

## *Akrasia* in Greek Philosophy

# Philosophia Antiqua

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# *Akrasia* in Greek Philosophy

From Socrates to Plotinus

*Edited by*

Christopher Bobonich and Pierre Destrée



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## NOTE ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Chris Bobonich** is Associate Professor of Philosophy and, by courtesy, Classics at Stanford University. He has written a number of articles on Greek ethical, and political philosophy and psychology. He is the author of *Plato's Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics* (Oxford UP, 2002). He is currently working on, among other topics, Aristotle's ethics.

**Thomas C. Brickhouse** is currently the J.F. East Professor of the Humanities and Professor of Philosophy at Lynchburg College. In addition to his work with N.D. Smith on the philosophy of Socrates *Socrates on Trial* (Oxford UP, 1989), *Plato's Socrates* (OUP, 1994), *The Philosophy of Socrates* (Westview, 2000), *The Trial and Execution of Socrates: Sources and Controversies* (OUP, 2002), and *The Routledge Guide Book to Plato and the Trial of Socrates* (Routledge, 2004), he has written on the ethics of Plato and Aristotle. With N. Smith, he is now completing a book on Socratic moral psychology.

**Gabriela R. Carone** is at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She is the author of numerous articles on Plato, and books including *Plato's Cosmology and Its Ethical Dimensions* (Cambridge UP, 2005). Her current research focuses especially on Plato's ethics and moral psychology from the early to the late dialogues.

**David Charles** is a Fellow in Philosophy at Oriel College, Oxford. He wrote *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action* (Duckworth, 1984) and *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence* (Oxford UP, 2000), and has co-edited collections of essays on *Metaphysics Lambda*, Wittgenstein and Explanation and Reduction in Contemporary Philosophy of Mind. He is currently working on issues concerning definition in Greek philosophy and on Aristotle's account of the relation of the soul and the body.

**Pierre Destrée** is Associate Research Fellow at the Fonds National belge de la Recherche Scientifique, and Associate Professor at the Université catholique de Louvain, Centre De Wulf-Mansion. His publications include articles on the Presocratics, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and he is the editor of *Aristote. Bonheur et vertus*, and *La Poétique d'Aristote*:

*lectures morales et politiques de la tragédie* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), and the co-editor, with N. Smith, of *Socrates' Divine Sign: Religion, Practice, and Value in Socratic philosophy* (special issue of *Apeiron*, 2005). He is currently working on Plato and Aristotle on poetry.

**Louis-André Dorion** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Montreal. He is the author of *Socrate* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2004) and of various French translations of Aristotle: *Aristote. Les réfutations sophistiques* (Vrin, 1995); Plato: *Charmide & Lysis*, and *Lachès & Euthyphron* (GF Flammarion, 1997 and 2004); and Xenophon: *Les Mémoires I* (Les Belles Lettres, 2000). He is currently working on the second (and last) volume of the new edition of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (Les Belles Lettres, 'Budé' series).

**Lloyd Gerson** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto. His most recent works include: *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Cornell UP, 2005); *Neoplatonic Philosophy. Introductory Readings* (with John Dillon) (Hackett, 2004), *Knowing Persons. A Study in Plato* (Oxford UP, 2003). His book *Ancient Epistemology* will appear with Cambridge UP in 2007.

**Jean-Baptiste Gourinat** holds a research appointment at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris ('Centre de recherches sur la pensée antique, Léon Robin'). His publications include *Les stoïciens et l'âme* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), *Premières leçons sur le Manuel d'Épictète* (PUF, 1998), *La dialectique des stoïciens* (Vrin, 2000), and, as co-editor with G. Romeyer Dherbey, *Socrate et les socratiques* (Vrin, 2001) and *Les stoïciens* (Vrin, 2005). He is directing a project of edition, translation and commentary of Zeno of Citium, and is currently working on ancient Stoicism and ancient logic, especially Plotinus' treatise on Dialectic.

**Christopher Rowe** is Professor of Greek at the University of Durham, UK. His most recent publications include: *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, with Sarah Broadie (Oxford UP, 2002), and *Plato's Lysis*, with Terry Penner (Cambridge UP, 2005); he has edited *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, with Malcolm Schofield (CUP, 2000), and *New perspectives on Plato*, with Julia Annas (Harvard UP, 2002). He is currently working on a book on *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing*.

**Ricardo Salles** is a Researcher at the Institute of Philosophical Research of the National University of Mexico (UNAM). He wrote *The Stoics on Determinism and Compatibilism* (Ashgate, 2005) and edited *Metaphysics, Soul and Ethics. Themes from the Work of Richard Sorabji* (OUP, 2005). He is currently working on Stoic cosmology.

**Christopher Shields** is a Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall and University Lecturer at the University of Oxford. He is author of *Order in Multiplicity: Homonymy in the Philosophy of Aristotle* (Oxford UP, 1999), *Classical Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, 2003), and, with Robert Pasnau, *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (Westview Press, 2003); he has two further books currently in press, *Aristotle's De Anima, Translated with Introduction and Notes* (OUP) and *Aristotle* (Routledge). He served as editor of the *Blackwell Guide to Ancient Philosophy* (Blackwell, 2002) and *The Oxford Handbook on Aristotle* (OUP, forthcoming). He is currently working on Aristotle's metaphysics and Plato's treatment of the soul.

**Nicholas D. Smith** is the James F. Miller Professor of Humanities at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. As co-author or co-editor with Thomas C. Brickhouse, he has published scholarly articles, as well as five books: *Socrates on Trial* (Oxford UP, 1989), *Plato's Socrates* (OUP, 1994), *The Philosophy of Socrates* (Westview, 2000), *The Trial and Execution of Socrates: Sources and Controversies* (OUP, 2002), and *The Routledge Guide Book to Plato and the Trial of Socrates* (Routledge, 2004); he has co-edited, with P. Woodruff, *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy* (OUP, 2000), and with P. Destrée, *Socrates' Divine Sign: Religion, Practice, and Value in Socratic Philosophy* (special issue of *Apeiron*, 2005). With T. Brickhouse, he is now completing a book on Socratic moral psychology.

**Roslyn Weiss** is the Clara H. Stewardson Professor of Philosophy at Lehigh University. She is the author of *Socrates Dissatisfied: An Analysis of Plato's Crito* (Oxford UP, 1998), *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno* (OUP, 2001), and *The Socratic Paradox and Its Enemies* (Chicago UP, 2006). She has published many articles on ancient Greek philosophy and on medieval Jewish philosophy. She is currently working on a book on Plato's *Republic*.

**Marco Zingano** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of São Paulo. He wrote a book on the Aristotelian theory of perception

(*Razão e Sensação em Aristóteles*, L&PM, 1998), and edited a collection of papers on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (*Sobre a Metafísica de Aristóteles*, Odysseus Editores, 2005). Some of his articles on Greek ethics will appear in a single volume (*Estudos de Ética Antiga*, Editora UFRJ). His main interests focus on Aristotle's moral philosophy and he is completing a Portuguese translation with notes of *Nicomachean Ethics* I 13–III 5.

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## NOTE

Since *akrasia* is one of the most studied themes in ancient ethics which is also of interest for non-specialists in ancient philosophy, the editors have decided to avoid using Greek fonts in the text, but to add quotations in Greek in footnotes.

## INTRODUCTION

Following Aristotle's famous example of *akrasia*, let's imagine a person who dives gluttonously at a piece of cake that happens to be on the table in front of her. As a very rough description from the outside, Greek philosophers called such a phenomenon a case of *akrasia*, a term meaning a 'lack of control' (which Latin translators labeled '*incontinentia*'), in opposition to *enkrateia* 'being in control' (translated into Latin as '*continentia*'). Since that very person usually doesn't dive at the first cake she sees, *akrasia* is either a description of an unusual or unexpected way of behaving, or a characterization of an occasional feature of character. But Greek philosophers also use the very same term to label what are apparently the two possible descriptions of what has happened from the point of view of the person who acts that way. On the one hand, her knowledge that eating that cake is a bad thing and to be avoided, whatever that knowledge consists in, turns out to have been too weak at that time, or at least not strong enough to insure that she acts on it; that knowledge wasn't capable of preventing her from eating the cake, as it usually did: *akrasia* is thus understood as weakness of knowledge. On the other hand, her appropriate, i.e. rational, desire to do what she thinks is better turns out not to be strong enough to be effectively motivational, and to lead the person to act rationally: *akrasia* here is the weakness of an appropriate desire which is close to what we currently call 'weakness of will'.

The Greek philosophical treatment of this theme presents two puzzles. The first puzzle is that, according to the first historical report we have from Aristotle, reflection on that phenomenon began with a denial of *akrasia*: Socrates thought that 'there is no such thing as *akrasia*' (*NE* VII 2, 1145b25–26). Plato and Aristotle challenged that denial so that we in fact see the Greek philosophical treatment of *akrasia* becomes the story of its rehabilitation, beginning with Plato's *Republic*, Book IV, and culminating with Aristotle's extensive treatment in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The second puzzle is that our story ends with the defense, by the Stoics, against Plato and Aristotle, of the Socratic denial of *akrasia*.

Let's take a very brief overview of this development, according to one standard story. The story begins with Socrates' famous description in

the *Protagoras* of what most people think can happen to human beings: ‘One asserts that most people are unwilling to do what is best, even though they know what it is and are able to do it, but do other things instead [...] One says that those who act that way do so because they are overcome by pleasure or pain or are being conquered (*kratoumenous*) [by spirit or love or fear]’ (*Prot.* 352d6–e9). We have in the *Protagoras* the clearest description of *akrasia*, as we characterized it in our opening paragraph. Even if it is not usual (‘those who act that way’ meaning that they usually don’t), it is a way of acting which is not uncommon and the easiest way to describe it is to say that those people are ‘conquered’ by pleasure or other feelings that make them lose their self-control. Finally, Socrates notes a little earlier on, it is said that in such people their knowledge is in the same state as a slave (352c1), who is under the control of another man. In that case, reason, or knowledge, e.g. that this cake in front of me is a bad thing and should be avoided, is powerless; as Ovid famously put it: ‘video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor’. We can also say that such people, because they are overwhelmed by pleasure or feelings, are now ‘unwilling’ to do what they nevertheless acknowledge they should do.

As we see from the following discussion with Protagoras, Socrates denies the existence of the phenomenon of *akrasia* by rejecting the possibility of the weakness of knowledge and the weakness of desire explanations. He first asserts (at least as an ideal?) that proper knowledge, *epistêmê* or *phronêsis*, cannot be ‘dragged around’ (352c1) but is ‘sufficient to save a person’ (c6–7), and so the person with that knowledge cannot be, like a slave, out of control. But not only that: the main point of his denial of *akrasia* seems to be his rejection of the idea that somebody could ever act against her own belief (or knowledge in a very large sense), i.e. the current belief she has at the very moment she chooses to do y. If she decides to do y instead of x, which she previously thought she should do, it is because she has now changed her mind, and now thinks that y is better than x. The very basis for such a claim is that all human beings (or ‘human nature’ as Socrates says [358d1–2]) cannot but do what they think, or believe, to be good, or best, at the moment they do it. Related to this assumption (which is the core of Socrates’ denial of *akrasia*) is the Socratic ‘paradox’ that ‘nobody errs willingly’ (358c7) which means that it is impossible to do willingly (or, perhaps, ‘intentionally’) something which the doer considers bad at the moment she does it.



Or put in the eudaimonistic terms of Greek ethics, ‘everybody wants the human good, i.e. to be happy, or to fare well’ (whatever the exact meaning of those terms), and so everybody does what she thinks or believes to be good (whatever the sense of ‘good’ is) as a means to be happy (or, alternatively, as a constituent of the human good). So we can also surmise that Socrates would have denied the possibility of what we call ‘weakness of will’, since the only ‘will’ or rational desire there is is directed at something good, and never at something bad, and it is impossible not to desire the good. Hence the labels ‘intellectualism’ and ‘uni-motivational theory’ capture, so our standard story goes, the Socratic denial of *akrasia*: we human beings have one and only one fundamental desire, that is, to be happy. And the *pathos* or *pathêma*, as Socrates calls it at 352e6 and 353a5, that is the phenomenon of a ‘bad’ choice (from the point of view not of the doer herself, but of the philosophical person who realizes that that doer is a wrongdoer) to be explained, is in fact a case of misunderstanding or ignorance (*agnoia*, *amathia*). In conclusion, *akrasia* does not exist: a person is always in control of herself, since she always acts according to her knowledge of, or belief about, what is best for her at the time she acts. If we have to describe that ‘pathos’ over the course of time, we would say that the person has lost the knowledge that she should do x instead of y, and that she simply does not know, or believe, at the very moment she does y, that y should be avoided.

The famous case of thirst, as well as the myth of Leontios, in *Republic* IV, so the standard story goes, sounds the death knell of such a conception. The Socrates of the *Republic* is not the historical Socrates anymore (or at least the Socrates as Plato understood him, or chose to present him). He is now something resembling the mouthpiece of the philosopher Plato himself, who doesn’t hesitate to defend philosophical ideas and conceptions which may, more or less strongly, go against Socrates’. As for our problem, we would not be exaggerating in saying that Plato is here rehabilitating the phenomenon of *akrasia*, against its denial by the Socrates who is presented in the *Protagoras*. For Plato now recognizes that human motivation is complex, and therefore fully acknowledges a conflict between two different, and opposed, desires, and even among three desires. As the case of thirst suggests, there is not only the desire to drink something good (or that appears good), which was Socrates’ conception of desire, but also, as Plato now adds, the simple desire to drink, which is the desire to drink as such. So we now have not only one,

but two different kinds of desire to drink: an irrational one, that is the desire to quench one's thirst, and the rational desire to drink something good. And those two desires can be in opposition at the same time, when, say, I am thirsty, but am aware that the water in front of me is bad to drink. A more complex case is Leontios who has, at the very same time, the 'epithumetic' desire to look at the pale corpses, as well as the 'rational' desire not to do so, and the 'thumetic' desire to avoid shame. That conflict ends with the victory of 'epithumetic' desire, so that the 'reasonable' or 'rational' desire, as well as the reasoned belief that it is bad to look at those corpses, are defeated. In other words, Leontios has lost self-control because of the weakness of his practical knowledge and of his rational desire.

A similar rehabilitation of *akrasia* seems also to be at the core of Aristotle's description of *akrasia*, since he begins *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII, by strongly rejecting Socrates' denial, which 'clearly runs against the phenomena' (VII 2, 1145b28). By making the distinction between a 'precipitate *akrasia*' where the agent doesn't deliberate at all, and 'weak *akrasia*' where she does, which is the real case of *akrasia*, Aristotle seems to define the case very clearly: the weak akratic has deliberated, and therefore knows that she should do x, and fully aware of this, nevertheless chooses y instead. And there are many passages, in *NE* VII and elsewhere, as well as in *De Anima*, in which Aristotle seems to recognize the existence of a conflict between two opposite desires at the very same time. Aristotle's contribution is therefore a much more detailed account of the phenomenon of *akrasia* as Plato recognized it, and its culmination as lack of self-control acquires now the status of a quasi-permanent feature of character, which therefore is very difficult to cure, since character is built up through habituation, and habituation is like a second nature.

Our standard story ends with the puzzle with which we began: following Socrates, the Stoics denied the existence of *akrasia* as a conflict between reason and the irrational part of the soul, since they thought there was no irrational part of the soul.

As constantly increasing scholarship reveals, such a story is not without many problems. Let's begin with Socrates. A first problem is the reliability, rarely put into question, of Aristotle's testimony: the standard story seems to ignore the fact that we simply do not find, in Plato's dialogues, the explicit denial of *akrasia* under that designation. More generally, if Socrates denied the existence of irrational desires, as Aristotle suggests, we may worry that we seem (at least according to

some interpreters) to find conflicting evidence in some of the Socratic dialogues. A second problem is this. The standard story holds that Socrates explained our phenomenon as a change of mind: but what is the cause of such a change of mind? Further, what really is the exact meaning of ‘changing one’s mind’? Is it really a realistic description of our phenomenon to say that at the moment  $t_2$ , the akratic person has totally ‘lost’ or ‘forgotten’ what she thought to be right at moment  $t_1$ ?

Concerning Plato, there are also two worries for the standard story. First, in his so-called ‘middle’ as well as ‘late’ dialogues Plato explicitly and repeatedly reaffirms the famous motto ‘Nobody errs willingly’ which is at the core of Socrates’ (alleged) denial of *akrasia*. And secondly, Plato never, in fact, uses the word *akrasia*, which appears only in Xenophon, and later in Aristotle. It may thus become more difficult to see exactly what the differences are between Socrates and Plato himself. Should we conclude that Socrates’ theory wasn’t as intellectualistic as the standard story holds? Or, alternatively, that Plato remains more intellectualistic than we thought?

In the case of Aristotle, the main problem interpreters have to solve is that of consistency. As we said, Aristotle seems to offer a strikingly contemporary view of the matter when describing what appears to be what we call ‘clear-eyed’ *akrasia*, when the person clearly sees or understands what she should do, but at the very same time, doesn’t do it, because of a lack of the right sort of desire to do it. But such a reading, which seems to be suggested in many passages, clashes, as interpreters have seen since the end of the 19th century, with what all interpreters consider the core of Aristotle’s causal explanation of *akrasia*, in the famous and puzzling chapter 3 of *NE VII*. The traditional interpretation of that text holds that Aristotle there offers a very intellectualistic explanation which may, after all, not be very different from Socrates’ account. This explanation involves the famous two practical syllogisms, where, as it seems, the akratic person doesn’t reach the conclusion of the ‘good’ syllogism, and so doesn’t ‘see’ or ‘understand’ that this cake here in front of her is to be avoided. Against such a reading, interpreters have tried to offer another interpretation of that puzzling passage which is much more in accordance with Aristotle’s descriptions elsewhere, holding that on the contrary, the akratic person does reach such a conclusion, and so perfectly ‘sees’ that this cake is a thing to be avoided, but does eat it because of a lack of the right sort of desire to avoid it. So we now have two possible interpretative

choices, once we abandon the uncharitable and unsatisfactory accusation of inconsistency: either to try to reconcile these tensions by offering a non-intellectualistic reading of our *NE* passage, or by offering an explanation of why, and how, we may interpret those descriptions that suggest Aristotle's acceptance of clear-eyed *akrasia* as consistent with an intellectualistic reading of the *NE* passage.

The Stoics might seem to be less problematic, since they seem to follow Socrates in denying *akrasia* without much ado, and there are not many passages or fragments where the word can be found. Yet the presence of akratic states of mind in Chrysippus' analysis of emotion, seems to imply that their denial was not so simple as it may seem at first sight. And the same must be said in the case of Cleanthes, since he considers *enkrateia* as one of his four cardinal virtues, among which *enkrateia* takes the place traditionally assigned to *phronêsis*. Another problem is the relationship between precipitate action and Stoic theory of responsibility: how can we hold, as Socrates would not have done, a precipitate akratic agent responsible for his bad choice and action?

The contributions in this volume try to face these problems by either defending some standard story with new arguments, or by proposing alternative readings. As the reader may be aware, discussions on *akrasia* have been particularly intense and vivid for at least the past two decades, and the editors don't intend to provide a single account of how each Greek philosopher should be interpreted. On the contrary, we have consciously tried to provide new ways of reading these texts that, explicitly or implicitly, are in opposition to one another, hoping these new contributions will become points of departure for further work on these problems.

The book begins with two chapters which focus on the two main related problems with which Plato's *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* seem to challenge their readers today: why does the person change his mind, and do y instead of x which she previously thought should be done, and what is the appropriate way to improve or reform such an (allegedly) akratic person?

In 'Socrates on *Akrasia*, knowledge, and the power of appearance', Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith answer the two related questions of why some things have the power of appearance at all and in what way the measuring art 'makes the appearances lose their power'. They argue that, for Socrates, 'the power of appearance' is tied to the psychological agency of the appetites and passions. Socrates believes that appetites and passions can be either strong or weak and that a

strong appetite or passion is one that causes an agent to believe that the pleasure at which it aims is in fact a good. It is a strong appetite or passion, then, that accounts for the object of the appetite or passion having the power of appearance. More precisely, it is irrational desire that inclines us to believe that what one is attracted to is a good, and if sufficiently strong it causes us to believe that what it is attracted to is good by preventing us from seeing or being persuaded by any reasons for thinking it is not good. Because Socrates is convinced that we always act for the sake of what we take to be good, Socrates thinks that one's character is determined not by whether one has irrational desires that are in accord with or that conflict with reason, but by where one stands with respect to seeing the truth. Those with strong appetites or passions are prevented from seeing the truth once the appetite or passions are enflamed and so are compelled by strong appetites or passions to see illicit pleasures or enjoyments as good. Socrates' position is that knowledge of the good is never defeated by the power of appearance because such knowledge is incompatible with the possession of strong appetites or passions.

The second chapter focuses on the *Gorgias*, and may be seen as a kind of reply to the first one. In 'A problem in the *Gorgias*: How is punishment supposed to help with intellectual error?', Christopher Rowe defends the thesis that even in the *Gorgias*, usually seen as transitional from Socratic to Platonic thought, Plato's Socrates, throughout the entire dialogue, holds a very strongly intellectualistic explanation of going wrong, and advocates a very intellectualistic way to help people to improve themselves, that is, simply through persuading them to change their current false beliefs. Yet it is true that Socrates explicitly suggests punishment for those who go wrong, and that the dialogue ends with the frightening eschatological myth. But in response to worries about the consistency of the *Gorgias*, or its transitional character, Rowe shows that punishment here doesn't mean ordinary corporal punishment, but is instead a purely philosophical punishment, whose real name is philosophical dialectic.

The next five chapters deal with Plato, focusing in very different ways on the relationship between the Socrates of the *Protagoras* and the Socrates of the *Republic* and other later dialogues.

Chris Bobonich's paper, 'Plato on *Akrasia* and knowing your own mind', is a transition to those essays that concentrate on Plato's middle-period views and it examines the *Protagoras* in light of those later views. Bobonich argues that on the *Protagoras*' explanation of apparent akratic

action, the person's mind is opaque to himself. He thinks that when he chose the wrong action he was pursuing pleasure, but in fact he was acting on a (mistaken) judgment about and desire for what is overall best. In a deep sense, the person does not know his own mind. Bobonich draws on some recent work on self-knowledge to explore worries to which our lack of awareness of our own minds gives rise and then turns to the details of Plato's solution to the puzzle of apparent akratic action in the *Protagoras*. He argues that although the standard interpretation of Plato's solution might be consistent with the text, there is an alternate solution to the puzzle that is compatible with Plato's broader commitments and is philosophically preferable to the standard interpretation. Bobonich suggests that reflection on this alternate interpretation may well lead one in the direction of Plato's views in the middle period, e.g., in the *Republic*. He closes by drawing on the worries to which our lack of awareness of our own minds gives rise to help illuminate the situation of the apparent akratic in the *Protagoras*.

In 'Unified agency and *akrasia* in Plato's *Republic*', Christopher Shields turns explicitly to the theory of the *Republic* and its division of the soul. He begins with Plato's concern that there is something ridiculous about the expression 'master of oneself' (*Rep.* 430e). Shields thinks this concern is apt, since if one is a master of oneself, then one is no less a slave to oneself; and it is hard to see how these two expressions could refer to the same person without fracturing the self into two. If we thus suppose that the expression indicates that we are made up of distinct *homunculi*, one of which leads and the other of which follows, then we are not self-masters, but rather composites of master-slave pairs. Shields sketches instead a theory of psychic division that focuses on the essential goodness of psychic unity. The *Republic*, he argues, offers a normative assessment of the grades of unity, ranging from the highly unified psyche of the just, to the tumultuous disarray of the tyrant. Moreover, Plato's interest in soul-division betrays no direct evidence of his having any interest in responding to a Socratic denial of *akrasia*, as is commonly supposed. Shields thus suggests that we should not be quick to conclude that soul division in *Republic* IV has as its primary—or even as its subsidiary—goal the righting of a Socratic wrong.

In 'Thirst as desire for good', Roslyn Weiss also focuses on *Republic* Book IV and its relation to the *Protagoras*. Weiss' target is the view that in *Rep.* IV, Socrates abandons his earlier denial of the possibility of *akrasia*; he partitions the soul to accommodate *akrasia*; and that this new view of the soul enables Socrates to replace his overly intellectualized

view of choice with a more balanced view according to which a person's beliefs about what is best may be overcome by emotion or appetite. Weiss challenges the belief that Socrates (or Plato) changes his mind in *Rep.* IV, but also argues that Socrates never denied *akrasia*. It is the *Protagoras*—not the *Republic*—that is anomalous. It is only in the *Protagoras* that *akrasia* is denied, she holds, and *akrasia* is denied there only under the non-Socratic assumption that pleasure is the good.

In 'Akrasia and the structure of the passions in Plato's *Timaeus*', Gabriela Carone turns to the *Timaeus* and its denial that anyone ever does wrong voluntarily, and proposes to square this denial with the *Timaeus*' talk of tripartition of the soul and the putative denial that the lower parts of the soul may share in propositional attitudes. Carone claims that in the *Timaeus*, as in earlier dialogues, the lack of control of reason in the person may be described as an intellectual failure (or as reason not being sufficiently strong or developed), and that this is true even when one may be motivated by the lower parts of one's soul. These lower parts, Carone thinks, share in judgmental attitudes that make the notion of internal balance and harmony possible, despite some passages seemingly suggesting the opposite. In this way our passions can be said to have some rational structure and even a rational place in the universe, to which the virtuous person must make them conform.

In 'Plato and *enkrateia*', Louis-André Dorion concentrates on the notion of *enkrateia* in Plato and Xenophon. It is in these authors that we first find the adjective *enkratês* used in the sense of 'master of oneself' with regard to corporeal pleasures. But, as Dorion points out, Plato and Xenophon differ greatly in the frequency with which they use this notion. Xenophon devotes three entire chapters to *enkrateia* in the *Memorabilia* (I 5; II 1; IV 5), but Plato never uses the term in his early dialogues. In the case of Plato, then, we seem to be up against a formidable paradox: whereas the very term *enkrateia* is supposed to be of Socratic inspiration, it never appears in his dialogues thought to be 'Socratic'! Dorion attempts to determine why Plato, on the one hand, attributes no importance to *enkrateia* in his early dialogues and, on the other hand, partially rehabilitates this notion in his middle and late dialogues. In doing so, he considers how closely Plato's position approximates, or is distinguished from that of other Socratics, in particular Xenophon, who give an essential role to *enkrateia* in preventing *akrasia*.

The chapters dealing with Aristotle present three very different interpretations of how to understand the famous central passage in *NE* VII 3, and of how, therefore, to reconcile the apparent conflict between the

explanation Aristotle gives us there, if it is to be interpreted as ‘intellectualistic’, and the way he describes *akrasia* in other texts.

In ‘Aristotle on the causes of *akrasia*’, Pierre Destrée tries to reconcile this apparent conflict by arguing that it is the aim of Aristotle himself, in *NE* VII, to reconcile Socrates’ intellectualistic explanation of *akrasia* as a lack of knowledge, and the common description of *akrasia* as a lack, or weakness, of ‘will’ or rational desire. Defending the traditional ‘intellectualistic’ reading of *NE*, Destrée argues that in the very moment of *akrasia*, the agent suffers a lack of knowledge which is a lack of *phantasia logistiké*, i.e. a lack of representation of this thing (e.g. the cake in front of her) as a bad thing to be avoided, and therefore suffers a lack of desire to avoid it. But this ‘intellectualistic’ cause of *akrasia* is not the very last cause of it; it is itself caused by the eruption of an irresistible irrational desire, which is itself caused by a lack of good upbringing and good character. *Enkrateia* is the feature of character that can resist the assaults of irrational desires, whereas *akrasia* is the feature of character that weakens or renders ineffective the *phantasia logistiké* which is the reason why the agent lacks suitable practical knowledge of what she should do at the moment she makes the wrong choice.

In ‘*Akrasia* and the method of ethics’, Marco Zingano contends that no precise answer can be given about Aristotle’s view of *akrasia* without considering the method he uses. The discussion of *akrasia* is probably the most clearly dialectical enquiry in the corpus, and the Aristotelian vindication of Socrates is emblematic of the way Aristotle conceives of this method: a claim is better established the more the relevant opinions are saved. It is therefore not surprising that one finds it so difficult to pinpoint Aristotle’s own claims about *akrasia*, for his generously conceived method puts him everywhere in a sort of neutral position, from which he tries to rescue if not all, at least most, or the most important reputable opinions on a certain topic. Nonetheless, perhaps the analysis of the phenomenon of *akrasia* will also provide Aristotle, Zingano concludes, with some reasons to doubt that dialectic is the appropriate method for ethics, for rescuing Socratic intellectualism and his plain denial of the akratic person cannot but clash with other well founded theses on *akrasia* in a way that no compromise can be reached without running into further trouble in some area or other.

In ‘Aristotle’s weak *akrates*: what does his ignorance consists in?’, David Charles faces the problem of how to characterize the state of the akratic who gets (as he assumes at the outset) to the good conclusion but fails to act accordingly, which is characterized as ‘being like that of a



person who does not know but merely says the verses of Empedocles.’ After contrasting and critically assessing two rival answers to this question (a cognitivist one which interprets the failure of the akratic as a failure of cognition, and a neo-Humean one which interprets it as a failure in practical knowledge which is understood as made up of two independent, separable, components: good cognition and good desire), Charles contends that neither of these interpretations is satisfactory because both rest on a misunderstanding of Aristotle’s view of desire. *De Anima* III 7 and 10 suggest, Charles holds, that to desire A is to see A as pleasant or think A good in a distinctive way: one which essentially involves the subject being attracted towards A. If so, desiring A will not be simply a matter of judging A to be good (as in the cognitivist account) nor yet a further and distinct non-cognitive impulse arising from such judgments (as in the neo-Humean account). On this view, the weak akratic fails in practical understanding because he fails to see that A is best in the distinctive way characteristic of desire.

The two contributions on the Stoics aim to determine precisely what role the vice of *akrasia* plays in theories which deny the existence of irrational desires, and how they can reconcile precipitate akratic actions with their theory of responsibility.

In ‘*Akrasia* and *enkrateia* in ancient stoicism: minor vice and minor virtue?’, Jean-Baptiste Gourinat reviews all ancient Stoic testimonies on *akrasia* and *enkrateia*, focusing on Cleanthes and Chrysippus. The Stoic definition of ‘self-control’ (*enkrateia*) is twofold: self-control is a ‘disposition not to go beyond right reason’ and a capacity to resist the attractions of pleasures. This twofold definition raises difficulties, which are best resolved by assuming the complementarity of the two parts of the definitions, rather than their mutual exclusiveness. The Stoic conception of *akrasia* must be in conformity with the definition of ‘self-control’, and thus *akrasia* must indicate primarily the incapacity to resist pleasures. Cleanthes’ conception is singular, since he assumes *enkrateia* to be one of the four cardinal virtues, taking the place of prudence. This seems to be a consequence of his insistence on the ‘physical’ aspect of virtue, and derives from Xenophon and Antisthenes. On the other hand, Chrysippus’ position was ambiguous, since he seems at some point to have endorsed a wider conception of self-control and *akrasia*, making *akrasia* the source of all passions. But it is rather intemperance (*akolasia*) that he describes as the source of all passions, and, even if he admits that there may exist cases of mental conflicts, he never depicts these cases as cases of *akrasia*, but rather as conflicting judgments. So,

Gourinat concludes, despite the tendency of the Stoics to develop a broader sense of *enkrateia* and *akrasia* implied by one of their definitions, they seem to have remained a minor virtue and a minor vice concerned with pleasures.

In ‘Epictetus on Moral Responsibility for Precipitate Action’, Ricardo Salles undertakes an examination of Epictetus’ views of precipitancy (*propeteia*)—a phenomenon that had been identified in the Aristotelian tradition as one of the modes of *akrasia*, the other being weakness. In contrast to Aristotle who focused almost exclusively on weak *akrasia*, Epictetus paid much attention to precipitancy for the reason that it poses a difficulty for the ascription of responsibility that arises directly from earlier Stoic theories of responsibility. Chrysippus had argued that to be responsible for an action it is sufficient that the agent acted from a decision or impulse that is based on prior reasoning. But this thesis leaves it unexplained why agents who act without any prior reasoning may also be responsible. For if the reason why reflective agents are responsible is that they are convinced by their reasoning that they should act as they do, as Chrysippus maintained, why should precipitate agents be responsible if they do not carry out this sort of reasoning? Salles’ answer is that Epictetus agrees with Chrysippus about the kind of reasoning that is sufficient for responsibility, but he complements the Chrysippus’ theory by providing an explanation of why actions done in the absence of reason may also be responsible. Epictetus’ argument hinges on the idea that precipitancy is in itself a condition that one ought to avoid from a moral point of view given the place of humans in the Stoic cosmos.

In contrast to the previous chapters which have suggested a discontinuous history of Greek conceptions of *akrasia*, our last contribution offers an attempt at reconciling these conceptions. In ‘Plotinus on *akrasia*: the neoplatonic synthesis’, Lloyd Gerson argues that Plotinus appropriates Peripatetic and Stoic insights into his expression of Platonic moral psychology generally and into his analysis of the phenomenon of *akrasia* in particular. Plotinus’ account focuses on the Platonic distinction between the soul or true self and the embodied composite human being. With the Stoics, Plotinus argues that the true self is the subject of rational desire. Gerson interprets rational desire as a second-order desire in relation to the first-order desires of the composite. With Aristotle, Plotinus distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary actions, arguing along Platonic lines that wrongdoing or vice and *akrasia* are involuntary. Akratic actions are involuntary because they arise from

desires involving embodiment. Such actions are possible owing to a weakness in one's self-identity. The virtuous person is one who identifies himself such that what he desires is only what intellect desires, namely, the Good. As Aristotle remarked, rational desire is for the unqualified, not the apparent, good. Plotinus wants to insist that the weakness that is a turning away from the real good is based on a failure to separate the real good that one truly desires from the apparent goods proposed to the embodied person. This failure is nothing more nor less than an inability to give the correct answer to the question 'who am I?'

Chris Bobonich and Pierre Destrée



## SOCRATES ON *AKRASIA*, KNOWLEDGE, AND THE POWER OF APPEARANCE

THOMAS C. BRICKHOUSE AND NICHOLAS D. SMITH

In a famous passage in Plato's *Protagoras* (352b3–358d2), Socrates takes up the question of whether 'the many' (*hoi polloi*), as Socrates calls them, are correct when they say that knowledge can be 'dragged around like a slave' by desire, pleasure, pain, love, and the like. Of course, Socrates makes quite clear at the outset where he stands: 'If someone knows what is good and evil, then he could not be forced by anything to act contrary to what knowledge says; understanding (*phronêsis*) is sufficient to aid a person' (352c4–7).<sup>1</sup> As the investigation proceeds, it becomes clear why Socrates is convinced he is right about this. Things can appear to be better or worse than they really are and the '...power of appearance (*dunamis tou phainomenou*) can often make us wander all over the place in confusion, changing our minds about the same things and regretting our actions and choices...' (356d4–7).<sup>2</sup> Knowledge, however, Socrates says, is the *metrêtikê technê*, the craft of measurement that 'can make the appearances lose their power by showing us the truth' (356d7–e1). Later Socrates declares that no one ever does what he even believes to be evil, for 'it is not in human nature...to go towards what one believes to be evil instead of good' (358d1–2). If someone does what is evil, accordingly, it must be because at the time he acted, he was taken in by the power of appearance, which caused him to mistake what is in fact evil for a good. So goes Socrates' explanation of why *hoi polloi* are mistaken and why there really is no such thing as *akrasia*, recognizing what is better for one and yet doing what is worse.

It seems clear in the *Protagoras* discussion that by the 'power of appearance' Socrates means the power of something that merely appears to be good to convince an agent that it is good. It also seems clear that

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<sup>1</sup> 'Εάνπερ γινώσκη τις τὰγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακά, μὴ ἂν κρατηθῆναι ὑπὸ μηδενὸς ὥστε ἄλλ' ἅττα πράττειν ἢ ἂν ἐπιστήμη κελεύῃ, ἀλλ' ἱκανὴν εἶναι τὴν φρόνησιν βοηθεῖν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ.

<sup>2</sup> (...) ἡ τοῦ φαινομένου δύναμις; ἢ αὕτη μὲν ἡμᾶς ἐπλάνα καὶ ἐποίει ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω πολλάκις μεταλαμβάνειν ταῦτα καὶ μεταμέλειν καὶ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς αἰρέσεσιν...

whenever the *metrêlikê technê* is present in someone he will not be defeated by the *dunamis tou phainomenou*. What is not clear in the *Protagoras* discussion is just why some things have the power of appearance at all. Nor is it clear in what way the *metrêlikê technê* ‘makes the appearances lose their power.’ In this paper we shall try to clarify both issues and in so doing criticize two different ways of understanding Socrates’ moral psychology. We shall argue, contrary to what is usually said, that, for Socrates, ‘the power of appearance’ is tied to the psychological agency of the appetites and passions. If what we shall argue is correct, Socrates believes that appetites and passions can be either strong or weak and that a strong appetite or passion is one that causes an agent to believe that the pleasure at which it aims is in fact a good. It is strong appetite or passion, then, that accounts for the object of the appetite or passion having the power of appearance. We shall then argue against the view recently advanced by Daniel Devereux that moral knowledge is never defeated by the ‘power of appearance’ because moral knowledge always generates a stronger desire for what is in fact good than any appetite or passion creates (Devereux 1995, 381–408). If we are correct, Socrates’ position is that moral knowledge is never defeated by the power of appearance because moral knowledge is incompatible with the possession of strong appetites or passions.

### 1. *The Traditional Theory*

Before we turn to the question of why some things have the power of appearance at all, perhaps we would do well first to consider several points about Socrates’ view of moral motivation, on which virtually all scholars agree. Few scholars, for instance, would contest the claim that Socrates is a eudaimonist both in the sense that the agent’s own conception of happiness provides the ultimate *justification* for anything other than happiness that an agent values but also in the sense that the agent’s conception of happiness provides the ultimate *explanation* for all that the agent undertakes.<sup>3</sup> To say that Socrates is a eudaimonist in the first sense is to say that he takes something to be a good if and only if he believes that it contributes in some way, either instrumentally or constitutively, to happiness.<sup>4</sup> To say that Socrates is a eudaimonist in

<sup>3</sup> See Morrison (2003) for an exception to this general rule.

<sup>4</sup> It takes us beyond the issues with which we are here concerned to take up the difficult question of Socrates’ view of the content of *eudaimonia*.

the second sense is to say that he believes that all actions are, in some sense, motivated by the agent's desire to promote his own happiness.<sup>5</sup> Thus, if we think of a rational desire as one for which the agent takes himself to have good reason, and since for a eudaimonist a good reason is always tied to the promotion of one's own happiness, we can say that, for Socrates, all actions are motivated by rational desires. This last point, of course, provides the basis for the well known Socratic dictum that all evil pursuits are, in some sense, the product of the agent's ignorance, for clearly, according to this way of viewing moral motivation, no one ever does what is bad for him, believing at the time he acts that it is bad for him. This much of Socrates' theory of motivation has, as we say, gone virtually unchallenged in the secondary literature, and we see no reason not to attribute any of these claims to Socrates.

In addition to these points, however, most scholars claim that, for Socrates, rational desires are the *only* desires a human agent ever possesses. This point has by now been so frequently advanced in the secondary literature that it deserves to be called the traditional view of Socratic motivation.<sup>6</sup> According to traditionalists, then, Socrates believes that whenever something appears good to us, it appears good only because we *already* have a rational desire for things of the sort we take it to be. If, for example, we are thirsty, the water in front of us appears to be good because and only because we have a rational desire for whatever is best for us in the given circumstances we happen to find ourselves in, and we believe drinking the water is best for us in these circumstances. Unless the agent who takes something to be good is either somehow prevented from acting or perhaps is overtaken by the power of an appearance that something else is better, she will always pursue what her single desire—her desire for the good—urges her towards. If we pose our first question—why does anything have the *dunamis tou phainomenou*, the proponent of the traditional view can only answer that it is the nature of certain things such as pleasure to appear good and it is the nature of certain things such as pain to appear evil.<sup>7</sup> The view that it is simply not in human nature to desire anything

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the distinction between 'rational' or 'justification' eudaimonism and 'psychological' or 'explanatory eudaimonism,' see Irwin (1995), 52–53.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Irwin (1977), 78 and (1995), 51–53, 75–76; Vlastos (1991), 148–54; Penner (1991), 147–202; (1996) 199–229, (1997), 117–49; Reshotko (1992), 145–70; Nehamas (1999), 27–58. We also endorsed a version of this view in Brickhouse and Smith (1994), Chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup> Traditionalists may differ about how many different kinds of things have the *dunamis tou phainomenou*. Someone such as Irwin, who believes that Socrates is a hedonist, will

other than what is good for us can be called Socrates' 'intellectualist theory of motivation.'<sup>8</sup>

Now several commentators<sup>9</sup> have noticed that the text is not always supportive of what we are calling the traditional view, for Socrates sometimes talks about *epithumiai* (appetites), and in several places (e.g., *Charmides* 167e1–5, *Meno* 77a3–78c2, *Gorgias* 493a1–b3; *Protagoras* 340a7–b1) explicitly distinguishes between what he calls *boulêsis* and *epithumia*, two of Plato's and Aristotle's favorite terms for rational and non-rational desire, respectively. Is not this evidence enough to show that Socrates recognizes two types of desires and thus that the traditionalists are mistaken?

One move available to traditionalists is to try to show that in most of the passages cited above Socrates uses *boulêsis* and *epithumia* interchangeably and so the appearance of '*epithumia*' does not indicate a second type of desire.<sup>10</sup> Doubtless recognizing that this understanding simply does not square with the use of these terms in the *Gorgias*, a number of commentators argue that in that dialogue Plato has his character 'Socrates' jettison intellectualism in favor of a more complex theory closer to the one we find in Plato's later works.<sup>11</sup> This move can be made only at a high cost, however, since Socrates clings to other essential elements of intellectualism about motivation elsewhere in the dialogue and thus, if indeed Plato is suddenly introducing the possibility of motivation by nonrational desires in the *Gorgias*, Socrates' own claims about motivation in the dialogue are incoherent.<sup>12</sup> But all such maneuvers to save the traditional understanding of Socratic intellectualism about motivation are severely undermined by a passage in the *Charmides*:

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argue that only pleasure has the power to appear good. See Irwin (1977), 102–115; and 1995, 81–92. Other traditionalists may argue that such things as good looks, health, wealth, and so forth have the power to appear good.

<sup>8</sup> Santas (1979) argues that our desire is for *what we take to be good for us*, whereas Penner and Rowe 1994 argue that our desire is for *what is really good for us*. We are persuaded by Penner's and Rowe's arguments on this issue.

<sup>9</sup> Santas (1979), 185–86; Irwin (1977), 310, n. 6; McTighe (1992), 263–97 (in Benson); Penner (1991), 202; Devereux (1995), 381–408.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this point, see Devereux (1995), 396–403.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Irwin (1977), 115–131; and 1995, 109–116; Cooper takes the more cautious approach that with Socrates' confrontation with Callicles, Plato is for the first time exploring the limitations of the brand Socratic intellectualism we have seen in the earlier dialogues. See Cooper (1999), 29–75, esp. 74–75.

<sup>12</sup> For more on this point, see Brickhouse and Smith (1994), 90 n. 25.



(Socrates is asking and Critias is responding):—And do you think there is any desire (*epithumia*) that is a desire for no pleasure but for itself and for other desires?

- Absolutely not.
- Nor is there any wish (*boulésis*), I think, that is a wish for no good but is instead a wish for itself and for other wishes.
- No, that follows. (167e1–5)<sup>13</sup>

Here we see that Socrates thinks it is commonly understood that we have one sort desire, *boulésis*, which is a desire for our good, and another sort, *epithumia*, which is a desire for pleasure as such.<sup>14</sup>

Although traditionalists may be tempted to dismiss this passage as a slip, they have available to them a less desperate way of trying to explain it away. They may argue that, for Socrates, the term ‘*epithumiai*’ refers to various events internal to the agent.<sup>15</sup> Hunger, in this view, is a pang one feels when one’s stomach is empty; fear is an uncomfortable twinge one experiences when one believes that one is in danger; and so forth. Now because these internal events are pleasures and pains, they *appear* good and evil, respectively, to an agent, which, according to the traditional account of Socratic intellectualism, implies we always have, antecedent to their occurrence, a rational desire to pursue the former and to avoid the latter. What the traditionalist must insist upon, however, is that such inner events, which is what Socrates is in the *Charmides* calling *epithumiai*, themselves have no causal powers whatsoever. Taken in isolation of any beliefs we already possess about their value, they are utterly inert. So though it is true, traditionalists may argue, that Socrates recognizes something he called *epithumia*, it is not anything like a species of desire in the ordinary sense.

But the traditionalist cannot escape so easily. Consider the following passage in the *Laches*:

<sup>13</sup> —‘Ἄλλ’ ἐπιθυμία δοκεῖ τίς σοι εἶναι, ἥτις ἡδονῆς μὲν οὐδεμιᾶς ἐστὶν ἐπιθυμία, αὐτῆς δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιθυμιῶν;—οὐ δῆτα.—οὐδὲ μὴν βούλησις, ὥς ἐγὼμαι, ἢ ἀγαθὸν μὲν οὐδὲν βούλεται, αὐτὴν δὲ καὶ τὰς ἄλλας βουλήσεις βούλεται.—οὐ γὰρ οὖν.

<sup>14</sup> We are indebted to Devereux for pointing out this passage. See Devereux (1995), 400.

<sup>15</sup> This line was suggested by Terry Penner in his comments at the symposium on ‘Desire, Action and Self-interest in Socratic Philosophy,’ American Philosophical Association—Pacific Division, San Francisco, 2001.

(Socrates speaking): And I wanted to include not only those who are courageous in warfare, but also those who are brave in dangers at sea, and the ones who show courage in illness and poverty and affairs of state, and then again I wanted to include not only those who are brave in the face of pain and fear, but those who are clever at fighting desire and pleasure, whether by standing their ground or running away—because there are some men, aren't there, Laches, who are brave in matters like these. (191c8–e2, Sprague trans.)<sup>16</sup>

This passage makes little sense unless Socrates believes that the desires to have pleasure and to avoid pain exert some sort of motivational influence on us. Otherwise, what would he mean by saying that the courageous are 'clever at fighting pleasure and pain.' Were pleasure and pain merely causally inert internal events, it would be nonsense for Socrates to talk about 'fighting' them.

But there is another, even more difficult problem for the traditional interpretation of Socrates' intellectualism about motivation, one that comes from the very discussion that seems to give the traditional account its strongest support, namely, the denial of *akrasia* discussion in the *Protagoras*. Let's briefly consider how the traditionalist understands Socrates' position. Imagine a person P who at time  $t_1$  sincerely believes that course of action X is better than Y and yet at  $t_2$  does Y instead of X. Socrates, of course, rejects the explanation of *hoi polloi* that P was overcome at some point between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  by some appetite or passion. Instead, Socrates believes that P changes his mind between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , coming to believe that Y is actually better than X.<sup>17</sup> Now, no one would ever suppose that this is a case of *akrasia* if P simply gets new, objective<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Γάρ σου πυθέσθαι μὴ μόνον τοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀπλιτικῷ ἀνδρείους, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐν τῷ ἱππικῷ καὶ ἐν σύμπαντι τῷ πολεμικῷ εἶδει, καὶ μὴ μόνον τοὺς ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐν τοῖς πρὸς τὴν θάλατταν κινδύνοις ἀνδρείους ὄντας, καὶ ὅσοι γε πρὸς νόσους καὶ ὅσοι πρὸς πενίας ἢ καὶ πρὸς τὰ πολιτικά ἀνδρείοι εἰσιν, καὶ ἔτι αὐτὸ μὴ μόνον ὅσοι πρὸς λύπας ἀνδρείοι εἰσιν ἢ φόβους, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς ἐπιθυμίας ἢ ἡδονὰς δεινοὶ μάχεσθαι, καὶ μένοντες καὶ ἀναστρέφοντες—εἰσὶ γάρ ποῦ τινες, ὃ Λάχης, καὶ ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις ἀνδρεῖοι. This passage is discussed in Devereux (1995), 388.

<sup>17</sup> Penner (1996) makes the distinction between 'synchronic belief *akrasia*'—in which one acts against what one thinks is best at the time—and 'diachronic belief *akrasia*'—in which one acts in a way that is contrary to what one believed was best before and also perhaps after the action, but not in a way that is contrary to what one believes is best for one at the moment of action. Penner correctly asserts that Socrates only denied the possibility of synchronic belief *akrasia*; Socrates did not deny the possibility of diachronic belief *akrasia*.

<sup>18</sup> By 'objective,' we simply mean information that is available to perceiver. In what follows, references to 'new information' should be understood to be 'objective' in this sense.

information or suddenly remembers something about X or Y, or both, between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . What convinces most people that there are times when one acts contrary to one's better judgment is precisely that case in which one acts contrary to what one previously thought is not good for one and yet has received no new information or remembered anything relevant to one's choices. Socrates' answer, of course, is that in such cases, lacking the craft of measurement, one succumbs to the power of appearance. In the case above, at sometime between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  Y *acquires* the power to appear to P to be the better than X.

But now the obvious question is: What explains Y's possession of the *dunamis tou phainomenou*, a power it did not seem to have in some cases only moments before the agent changes his opinion? Wishing not to assign any role to nonrational desire in Socrates' explanation, the traditionalist argues that, for Socrates, the acquisition of the power of appearance owes the fact that pleasure and pain naturally appear greater or smaller than they really are depending on their proximity to the agent. Indeed, how else are we to understand the question Socrates puts to the many: 'Do things of the same size appear larger when near at hand and smaller when seen at a distance, or not?' (*phainetai humin tēi opsei ta auta megethē egguthen men meizō, porrōthen de elattō*, 356c5–6). And when *hoi polloi* replies, as they must, in the affirmative, Socrates is quick to add that this is why the *metrētikē technē* is our savior, for it makes the appearances lose their power (*akuron men an epoiēse touto to phantasma*) by making clear the truth, gives our soul piece of mind (*hēsuchian an epoiēsen tēn psuchēn*), while it remains in the truth and saves our life' (356d7–e2). Socrates' explanation, then, according to the traditionalist, is like a common-sense account of belief acquisition by means of perception. Pleasures and pains appear larger when they are closer and smaller when they are remote, and unless we have some well-grounded belief to correct the appearances, we believe that they are as they appear. Finally, if the greater balance of pleasure over pain always constitutes the better course for the agent to pursue, we can explain P's pursuit of Y instead of X in terms of the pleasure afforded by X appearing to be closer and hence larger. Nonrational desire need not enter the explanatory picture.

But before we accept the traditionalist's understanding of Socrates' position, we would do well to take a closer look at just what endows an object with the power of appearance. As we have seen, the clear suggestion of Socrates' account of how the craft of measurement saves us is that proximity to the agent plays a crucial role in the explanation.

Socrates' examples—size, depth, number and sounds (*Protagoras* 356c5–8)—certainly lead one to think that the sort of proximity he has in mind is spatial proximity. A little reflection, however, shows us that it is very unlikely that this is what Socrates really thinks. In the first place, ordinarily we assume that the closer an object is to a perceiver the more likely his perception of the object is to be veridical. But, *ex hypothesi*, in the phenomenon the many call *akrasia*, the perceiver makes a mistake (of some sort) about the object he pursues. It cannot very well be, then, that, for Socrates, it is the mere fact that Y has actually become closer to the agent that explains why P moves from having the correct judgment that X is better than Y to the incorrect judgment that Y is better than X. The explanation of the phenomenon must also include some account of why it is that, in the case of pleasures, spacial proximity tends to make a perception of pleasure *less* likely to be veridical.

Moreover, as spatial proximity to an object changes, one's perception of the *size* of the object perceived changes. Thus, if Socrates thinks that it is a change in spatial proximity to an object that explains why an agent changes his mind about its value, Socrates must also think that we always correlate the greater size of a pleasurable object with greater value. Now, no one would deny that this sometimes happens. Consider, for example, P, a glutton who has been told by his physician that eating rich foods endangers his health, spies at  $t_1$  a chocolate tart C at a distance and forms the judgment that it is not, on balance, in his interest to pursue it. At  $t_2$ , however, after C has been placed directly in front of him, P reassesses the matter and decides that he ought to eat it after all. If his spatial proximity to C is what explains his change of mind, it can only be because he now, at  $t_2$ , perceives that C is larger than he thought it was at  $t_1$ , and he justifiably believes that C will provide him with more pleasure than he did at  $t_1$ . All that has really happened, though, is that at  $t_2$  P has new, even if misleading, information about the tart. The information he has gained at  $t_2$  tells him that there is more pleasure to be gained than he previously supposed. As we have already seen, however, surely the many will not take themselves to have been defeated if Socrates makes his own, alternative account rest on an agent's receiving new information about a pleasurable object. Otherwise the many would have to count as being 'overcome by pleasure' every instance in which an agent decides that it is in his interest to pursue something after he has been misinformed that it is not really, on balance, harmful. The many will rightly insist that the phenomenon to be explained occurs only when the agent's information about the

pleasurable object remains the same and the agent nonetheless changes his assessment of the object's value.

We can make better sense of Socrates' remarks, then, if we take him to mean that it is temporal proximity that helps explain when an object comes to have the power of appearance and that Socrates wants us to understand temporal proximity as analogous to spatial proximity. Just as spatial proximity alters the appearance of the size of an object, Socrates thinks, so temporal proximity alters the appearance of the amount of pleasure (or pain) an object will yield. A pleasurable object that provides immediate gratification always appears greater than does the same object when it can only be enjoyed in the future. The same of course applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to pain. Accordingly, a pleasurable object that can be enjoyed only in the future and that is judged not to be worth the resulting pain may—because it appears sufficiently large—be judged worth the pain when the object provides immediate gratification. To return to the tart, it is the apparent greater pleasure of eating it now, at  $t_0$ , that makes C appear to be worth the evil of poor health, suffering that will be experienced only in the relatively distant future. The craft of measurement would 'save' P because it would see through the appearances that are distorted by temporal proximity and weigh correctly the good of eating the tart now against the future evil of poor health and determine correctly by which choice the overall good of the agent will be promoted.

It is important, however, that we not assume that Socrates equates the mere availability of an object of a sort that provides an agent with pleasure with temporal proximity, for Socrates' commitment to eudaimonism requires that at the time an agent actually pursues an object the agent must believe that it is good. To help us appreciate this distinction between availability and temporal proximity, let's again consider P, our lover of chocolate tarts. Let us imagine that P has just now finished a very substantial and satisfying meal, filled with several of his favorite dishes. Now suppose that at  $t_1$  P has the chocolate tart C placed directly in front of him, but—already sated and recalling the advice of his doctor—he declines to eat the tart, declaring that he needs to heed his doctor's advice to lay off rich foods. Although C is plainly available, P obviously does not at  $t_1$  judge the pleasure of eating C to be worth to subsequent evil he will suffer. Nonetheless, after a brief interval (during which he has managed to digest enough of his previous meal to lose his feelings of complete satiety), at  $t_2$ , we find P devouring C after all. So, what gave C the power of appearance for

P at  $t_2$ ? Why, in other words, has P come to believe at  $t_2$  that eating C is a good for him? What has made C appear at  $t_2$  to be worth the subsequent ill-effects? Since any object is seen as pleasurable only if it is in some way desired, P plainly has formed a desire of some sort for C at  $t_2$ . According to the traditionalist, it must be a rational desire, a desire formed by P's having discovered some *reason* for thinking that the pleasure of eating C is, on balance, good. But there is nothing in our situation that provides P with any new information about C, for he has been sitting right in front of C all the while. He has not been told that it is really not as rich as he previously thought or that it is the most delicious chocolate tart he will ever taste. Given the constraints the traditionalist is under, all she can say, it seems, is that P just judges C at  $t_2$  to be more pleasurable than P judged it to be at  $t_1$ , and can give no reason why.

If we are to avoid what appears to be the hopeless arbitrariness of the position the traditionalist ascribes to Socrates, we must think that Socrates recognizes that nonrational desires have an explanatory role to play in P's decision to devour C at  $t_2$ . Because a nonrational desire demands immediate satisfaction, it can explain why the pleasure of C appears to be larger at  $t_2$  than it did at  $t_1$ , when P did not possess a nonrational desire for C. Of course, it cannot be the case that P's nonrational desire for C alone causes him to pursue C. Were that the case, Socrates' position would be indistinguishable from that of the many, who think that people often act from nonrational desire, contrary to what they think best. But if a nonrational desire for the pleasure of C explains why the pleasure of C appears to be greater than it did at  $t_1$  we can see how it explains why P would form the judgment that pursuing C is a good after all, and thereupon for a rational desire to pursue C.

It is important to notice that nothing about the introduction of a nonrational desire into the explanation of the phenomenon most people call *akrasia* conflicts with Socrates' commitment to eudaimonism. That is, nothing we have said conflicts with Socrates' view that whenever we act, we act for the sake of the good as we conceive it and, thus, that everything we do is always motivated by a rational desire. Still, it is only fair to say that if this account is right, Socrates is not an intellectualist about motivation in the precise way that the traditionalist makes him out to be, for he recognizes nonrational desires as having a role to play in the explanation of how some actions come to be performed.

We are now in a position to answer the first question we posed at the outset: Why do some objects have *dunamis tou phainomenou*, the power

of appearance? Something acquires the power of appearance when it becomes the object of a nonrational desire and so becomes recognized by an agent as a way to satisfy some appetite or passion—for example, as a pleasure or as a relief from some pain. We can also see why Socrates refers to the craft of measurement as our savior, for it allows its possessor to correct the appearance and to judge correctly whether an apparent good is really worth the cost that must be paid in terms of a subsequent evil. It would be a mistake, however, to infer that anyone who lacks the craft of measurement is doomed to be taken in by objects that have acquired the power of appearance. In the *Apology* (37a6–7) Socrates informs the jury that he ‘is convinced that [he] has not done wrong to anyone,’ including presumably himself. We can infer from this that Socrates was never taken in by a *dunamis tou phainomenou*. Surely Socrates experiences appetites and passions; it is just that in his case his appetites and passions never caused him to pursue something because it appeared good when it was not. Why, then would some people—perhaps even most people—be susceptible to the power of appearance and Socrates not? The answer cannot be that Socrates, in spite of his repeated denials to the contrary, really possesses moral knowledge, the craft of measurement which ‘makes the appearances lose their power.’<sup>19</sup> A more plausible explanation, we believe, can be found in Socrates’ remark to Callicles in the *Gorgias* that we ought never allow the appetites ‘to fill themselves up’ (505b1–10), for then they become undisciplined and lead their possessors to engage in all sorts of immoral and illegal actions. Here the idea seems to be that appetites become stronger the more they are indulged and the only way to make them weaker is to subject them to various forms of correction or punishment.<sup>20</sup> To the extent an appetite or passion is disciplined, the agent is capable of considering other factors in making a final judgment about whether to pursue the object of the appetite or passion—including factors that may weigh against pursuing the object.

If this is correct, Socrates believes that we can allow an appetite or passion to become stronger or we can make it weaker, where the criterion of strength and weakness is the degree to which the agent

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<sup>19</sup> For the implausibility of the view that Socrates’ professions of ignorance are insincere and that he possesses the knowledge he says he lacks, see Brickhouse and Smith (1994), 30–55.

<sup>20</sup> For more on Socrates’ views about the need to discipline appetites that have grown strong—in some cases through punishment—see Brickhouse and Smith (2002), 28–31.

is blocked from, or able to, consider alternative courses of action. Thus, we think good sense can be made of the fact of those who lack knowledge some and not others succumb to the power of appearance because some have allowed their appetites or passions to grow strong while others, like Socrates, either have not indulged their appetites or passions more than they ought or have received the curative effects of having had their appetites or passions disciplined through punishment. We are not arguing that Socrates never sees things as good when they are not. Rather, because his passions and desires are weak, his initial impulse to pursue what appears good is not sufficiently strong to motivate him. Instead of acting on what initially appears good to him, he deliberates and, as he tells us in the *Crito* (46b4–6), acts only on the basis of whatever reason seem best to him in his deliberations.

## 2. *Devereux's Account of Socratic Motivation*

Let's now turn to the second question we posed: How does knowledge make the *dunamis tou phainomenou* lose its power? The reasons we have given for rejecting the traditional account of Socratic motivation is heavily indebted to Daniel Devereux's 1995 article, 'Socrates' Kantian Theory of Motivation,' although, as we shall see, Devereux cannot not very well agree with our view that only individuals with strong nonrational desires succumb to the power of appearance. Devereux maintains that knowledge makes the *dunamis tou phainomenou* lose its power because knowledge is always stronger than the nonrational desire that causes something to appear good. Indeed, Devereux believes that, for Socrates, the craft of measurement and strong nonrational desire are not exclusive and that anyone who possesses Socratic wisdom may well have to contend with strong inclination to act contrary to his judgment about what is best. Devereux puts the point this way:

...in the *Laches* and the *Gorgias* [Socrates] seems to assume that courage is characteristically manifested in overcoming motivational factors opposed to the agent's rational decision. Knowledge of the good does not eliminate nonrational desire; rather it produces a desire or motivational force that is stronger than any nonrational desire or emotion.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Devereux (1995), 404–405.



If Devereux is right, Socrates believes that moral knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue (Devereux 1995, 404–406). Whether one has unruly nonrational desires is irrelevant. In this respect then, Devereux argues, Socrates' view of virtuous motivation is strikingly different from that of either Plato or Aristotle, both of whom assume that moral knowledge *requires* the acquiescence of all nonrational impulses. In Devereux's view, Socrates thinks that knowledge saves us because it not only 'sees the truth' in every situation but its superior motivational strength unfailingly prevents nonrational desire from causing a change in the knower's cognition of what is best.

One important piece of evidence that Devereux cites in favor of his interpretation is the passage in the *Laches* we looked at above. There, recall, Socrates says the courageous are 'clever at fighting desire and pleasure.' Presumably, then, 'desire and pleasure' exert some motivational influence on the virtuous agent which she must 'fight.' More evidence, Devereux contends, comes from Socrates' exhortation to Callicles in the *Gorgias* to pursue a life of self-control. There Socrates says: '...for it's not like a self-controlled person to avoid and pursue what isn't appropriate, but to avoid and pursue what he should, whether these are things to do or people, or pleasure and pains, and to stand fast and to endure where he should' (507b5–8). Devereux's point is that it seems to make little sense to talk about 'fighting' and 'standing fast' and 'enduring' unless that against which one fights, stands fast, and endures exercises some motivational influence on the virtuous agent.

So according to Devereux, there is nothing about the Socratic conception of virtue that precludes the possibility of the virtuous soul being pulled in different directions by its rational and nonrational desires. It is far from clear, though, that Socrates thinks that 'fighting' and 'standing fast' and 'enduring' against pleasure really requires the sort of conflict in the soul Devereux has in mind. If we return to Socrates' exhortation to Callicles, we see that Socrates says that immediately after declaring that the self-controlled person 'stands fast and endures where he should' Socrates links happiness to self-control and self-control to discipline, presumably the discipline of one's nonrational urges:

So this is how I set down the matter and say that it is true. And if it is true, then a person who wants to be happy must evidently pursue and practice self-control. Each of us must flee away from lack of discipline (*akolasian*) as quickly as his feet will carry him, and must above all make sure that he has no need of being disciplined, but if he does have that need, either he

himself or anyone in his house, either a private citizen or a whole city, he must pay his due and he disciplined (*dikēn epiteon kai kolasteon*), if he is to be happy... he must not allow his appetites (*epithumiai*) to be undisciplined or to undertake to fill them up... (*Gorgias* 507c8–e3)<sup>22</sup>

Here it could not be clearer that having resistible, well-disciplined appetites is necessary for self-control after all. If so, the reason that the self-controlled person ‘stands fast and endures where he should’ is because his appetites are not so powerful as to prevent him from reasoning effectively about what is best. If they were too powerful, he would ‘reason’ that pursuing the lure of pleasure is best for him, and so would act disgracefully. The same analysis can be given of Socrates’ claim in the *Laches* that the courageous person ‘fights against desire and pleasure.’ To say that Socrates believes that virtue requires that appetites or passions be disciplined and controlled is not to say that he thinks that one who is hungry, tired, or fearful feels *nothing*. Rather, Socrates probably means that instead of letting his nonrational desire for the pleasure at which each of these *pathē* aims ‘fill itself up,’ the virtuous person responds by quickly mastering them and keeping his rational capacity alert to all other pertinent considerations. There is nothing about the *Laches* passage that requires that there be any protracted struggle between wisdom and appetite or passion. If so, and if Socrates’ exhortation to Callicles in the *Gorgias* commits Socrates to the notion that moral virtue requires harmony between one’s knowledge of what is best and one’s nonrational desires, then Devereux cannot be right that knowledge ‘makes appearance lose its power’ because knowledge is always stronger than nonrational desire. Only if self-control does not require knowledge, contrary to what Socrates explicitly tells Callicles, can knowledge and strong appetite or passion exist together in the same soul.

The *Protagoras* itself also provides evidence regarding the sort of desire that is compatible with moral knowledge. Recall that immediately after Socrates’ assertion that the *metrêtikē technē* ‘makes the appearances lose their power,’ he immediately adds, ‘it makes the soul have peace of

<sup>22</sup> Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα οὕτω τίθεμαι καὶ φημι ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι: εἰ δὲ ἔστιν ἀληθῆ, τὸν βουλόμενον, ὡς ἔοικεν, εὐδαίμονα εἶναι σωφροσύνην μὲν διωκτέον καὶ ἀσκητέον, ἀκολασίαν δὲ φευκτέον ὡς ἔχει ποδῶν ἕκαστος ἡμῶν, καὶ παρασκευαστέον μάλιστα μὲν μηδὲν δεῖσθαι τοῦ κολάζεσθαι, ἐὰν δὲ δεηθῇ ἢ αὐτὸς ἢ ἄλλος τις τῶν οἰκείων, ἢ ιδιώτης ἢ πόλις, ἐπιθετέον δίκην καὶ κολαστέον, εἰ μέλλει εὐδαίμων εἶναι... οὐκ ἐπιθυμίας ἔδοντα ἀκολάστους εἶναι καὶ ταύτας ἐπιχειροῦντα πληροῦν...

mind' (*hêsuchian an epoiêsen tên psuchiên*—356e1). Here Socrates wants us to understand that when the 'appearances lose their power' they cease to have any significant motive force. We can make good sense of the additional power of the *metrêtikê technê*, the power to produce peace of mind, only if the Socratic knower's *epithumia* is weak and, thus, disposed to fall in line with knowledge of what is best.

### 3. *An Objection Considered*

At this point someone might object that if our view were correct, Socrates would have no reason to refer to moral knowledge as the *metrêtikê technê*, the craft of measurement. It is clear in the *Protagoras* that Socrates thinks that moral knowledge judges appearances. It objectively 'measures' each and it 'saves' us by preventing us from being taken in by the power of appearance. But, so the objection goes, according to our view, Socratic knowledge is incompatible with strong nonrational desire and yet it is strong nonrational desire that makes objects appear to be good when they are not. Thus, if our view were correct, the craft of measurement would never be engaged in what Socrates plainly tells Protagoras is its proper business: objectively measuring appearances one against the other and correctly deciding where our good lies. If so, it would seem that Devereux's position is correct after all. The craft of measurement is compatible with even exceedingly strong nonrational desires that make objects appear quite clearly to be good when they are not.

This objection rests on a misunderstanding of what we mean by strong and weak nonrational desires. Let us reiterate that we agree with our opponents that in the *Protagoras* discussion Socrates assumes that it is the nature of pleasure and relief from pain to appear good. The question, then, is not *when* do pleasurable objects appear good—in our view they *always* appear good—but rather when do they *compel belief* that they are good. Someone with a strong nonrational desire is subject to being overcome by the power of appearance, the sort of defeat the many mistakenly call *akrasia*. We believe that, for Socrates, moral knowledge is incompatible with strong nonrational desire in this sense. Now, since pleasure and relief from pain always appear good, even if one does not have strong nonrational desires, whenever there are two or more appearances from which to choose, one must still decide which is the appearance of what is really good. Someone who

can make these judgments unfailingly, even in the face of the clearest appearance to the contrary, and who can give the correct account of why she judges as she does, possesses the *metrêtikê technê*. Thus, we are not denying that, for Socrates, the knower must distinguish the greater good from what merely appears to be the greater good.

So, in claiming that the *metrêtikê technê* requires weak nonrational desire, we are not suggesting that moral knowledge somehow prevents its possessor from even experiencing what falsely appears good—an appearance moral knowledge must then correct. Our position does require, though, that once an authoritative judgment is made, the *epithumia* that was aroused by a false appearance must fall in line with the judgment about what is really good. It is in this sense, then, that we claim anyone who possesses *metrêtikê technê* is free from the tyranny of strong nonrational desire. Only if the Socratic knower's nonrational desires are weak in the sense that they always comply with knowledgeable judgment can sense be made of Socrates' insistence, expressed in both the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras* itself, that moral knowledge yields harmony within the soul.

#### 4. *Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle*

As we have seen, Devereux argues that Socrates' moral psychology is importantly different from that of either Plato or Aristotle. Socrates disagrees with his successors over the possibility that virtue can exist together with strong, nonrational desire. According to Devereux, Socrates thinks they are compatible; Plato and Aristotle did not. Although we disagree with Devereux about this particular aspect of Socrates' moral psychology, we nonetheless agree with him that there is an important difference between Socrates' view, on the one hand, and those of Plato and Aristotle, on the other. The moral psychologies of Plato and Aristotle famously allow for the possibility of psychic *stasis*. One could see good reason for not pursuing some object and yet feel the motivational pull of appetite or passion to pursue that thing anyway. For some who are conflicted, the motivational pull of appetite or passion is not sufficiently strong that they capitulate. Aristotle calls these people *enkraic*. For others so conflicted, the motivational pull is sufficiently strong that they do capitulate—this seems clearly to be what happens to Leontius in the famous passage in Plato's *Republic* IV (439e6–440b4). Aristotle calls these people *akratic*.

Socrates sees nonrational desire operating in a different way. Instead of inclining us directly to act, it inclines us to believe that what it is attracted to is a good, and if sufficiently strong it causes us to believe that what it is attracted to is good by preventing us from seeing or being persuaded by any reasons for thinking it is not good. This allows us to see why Socrates failed to develop the various categories of character we find in Plato and Aristotle. Because Socrates is convinced that we always act for the sake of what we take to be good, Socrates thinks that one's character is determined not by whether one has nonrational desires that are in accord with or that conflict with reason, but by where one stands with respect to seeing the truth. Those with strong appetites or passions are prevented from seeing the truth once the appetite or passions are enflamed and so are compelled by strong appetites or passions to see illicit pleasures or enjoyments as good. Others, who have not developed strong appetites or passions but who also do not have the craft of measurement, have either right or wrong opinion about their own good but their cognitive states are not determined by their conative dispositions. Those who possess the *metrêtikê technê*, however, would always judge correctly, one condition of which is that they have lived in accordance with the advice Socrates gives Callicles in that they have 'not allowed their appetites to become undisciplined or to fill themselves up.' If our argument in this paper is correct, those who fail to heed this advice are doomed '...to wander all over the place in confusion' (*Protagoras* 356d6–7), always at the mercy of the power of appearance. Maintaining our appetites and passions in a disciplined condition, then, does not guarantee that we will always make the right choices; but it serves, at least, to allow us to continue considering all of the reasons available to us for making choices, and thus allows us to continue making choices, rather than leaving us in a condition where our choices become foregone conclusions, because our capacity to judge has been diminished by the potent effects of strong appetites or passions.



A PROBLEM IN THE *GORGIAS*:  
HOW IS PUNISHMENT SUPPOSED TO HELP  
WITH INTELLECTUAL ERROR?\*

CHRISTOPHER ROWE

1. *Background*

What has become the traditional Anglophone view of Plato's writing divides it up into three periods: 'early', 'middle', and 'late'. 'Early' usually means 'Socratic', i.e., closer to the thought of the historical Socrates; 'middle' tends to mean 'including reference to a theory of 'separated' Forms' (*vel sim.*); 'late' means anything after that. (The 'late' dialogues, on this traditional, Anglophone view, are a collection of dialogues that have rather little in common, except that the kind of philosophy they represent seems—to those who wish to see it that way—closer to what we moderns, or we modern Anglophones, call 'philosophy'.)<sup>1</sup> Nowadays,

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\* The present paper, originally presented—in a rather less developed version—to an invited session of the XII Congreso Nacional de Filosofía, held in Guadalajara, Mexico, in November 2003, is or was the first in a series of three papers on the *Gorgias*, all of them sharing a virtually identical first section ('Background'), and an overlapping second ('The problem of the *Gorgias*'). The second paper in the series, 'The Good and the Just in Plato's *Gorgias*', was originally presented to a colloquium held in Zagreb, Croatia in March 2004, and was published—a little prematurely—in Damir Barbaric (ed.), *Platon über das Gute und die Gerechtigkeit* (Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2005, 73–92, and will appear in slightly revised form in a Festschrift for Jerry Santas edited by George Anagnostopoulos; the third, 'The Moral Psychology of the *Gorgias*' (from which below, in a Postscript, I borrow several paragraphs) was presented at the Seventh Symposium Platonicum of the International Plato Society, held in Würzburg, Germany in July 2004, and will be included in the *Proceedings* of the Symposium, edited by Michael Erler and Luc Brisson. The content of all three papers will, in modified form, constitute a chapter in my forthcoming book, *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (Cambridge University Press).

<sup>1</sup> For a recent restatement of this traditional view of the dialogues as dividing into early-(transitional)-middle-late, see Gail Fine, *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected Essays* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003), n. 1 to Introduction. Fine refers back, for a defence of the traditional view, to Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY [also Cambridge University Press, Cambridge], 1991, chapters 2 and 3; but these two chapters are mostly concerned with a different proposal ('that through a "Socrates" in Plato we can come to know the thought of the Socrates of history': Vlastos, op. cit., p. 81), and presupposes the traditional division of Plato's works rather than defending it.

however, this way of looking at the dialogues—let us call it the ‘developmentalist’ view—looks distinctly less attractive than it once did, notwithstanding the support that it appears to derive from Aristotle’s reading of Plato, and the emphasis that reading gives to the point about the ‘separation’ of forms. The main reason for this is the recognition that the developmental model has nothing to support it *apart* from Aristotle—and a basic psychological plausibility: what more plausible, so the argument goes, and more natural, than to suppose that Plato started by reproducing, or exploring, what was essentially his master Socrates’ thinking, but then moved on, beyond Socrates (especially in metaphysics, if one takes Aristotle’s line)—and finally entered a period of mature reflection, in which, perhaps, he abandoned some of the optimistic constructions of his ‘middle’ period?<sup>2</sup> For if we take, just by itself, the evidence afforded by the measurement of Plato’s style,<sup>3</sup> what we seem to find is an early group which contains *both* the so-called ‘Socratic’ dialogues, i.e. dialogues untouched by ‘middle-period’ Form-theory, *and* three of the central dialogues that contain that very theory: *Cratylus*, *Phaedo* and *Symposium*.<sup>4</sup> We may, of course, choose to

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<sup>2</sup> Such a picture of the evolution of Plato’s thought is likely to appear particularly appealing against the background of a general assumption that progress in philosophy is linear, and of the more particular assumption that Aristotle is a much more evolved specimen of a philosopher than his teacher Plato (and Plato than *his* teacher, Socrates). Fine’s book (2003) reflects both assumptions, which are indeed endemic among British and American scholars. I myself regard such assumptions as at least unhelpful, to the extent that they interfere with our giving Plato, and Socrates, a decent hearing; and the present essay firmly rejects them. That is to say, I am not in the least inclined to treat the kinds of positions I shall attribute to the Socrates of the *Gorgias* (who is, in my present view, not so distantly related to the real Socrates) as quaint, or simply false. Part of the point of the present attempt to recover what this Socrates is saying is that in my view—which I share with my friend, colleague, and co-author Terry Penner—it stands a rather good chance of being *true*.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that we must necessarily believe everything we are told by the stylometrists, whose track record—at least in more recent times—has not been uniformly good. However (a) at any rate some of their conclusions appear to be reasonably firm; and (b) in any case the traditional early-middle-late paradigm has generally been thought (mistakenly: see below) to be supported by those firmer conclusions.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Kahn (1996) and (2003), 96: ‘At first sight, the division into three stylistic groups [proposed by a number of scholars working mainly in the nineteenth century] seems to confirm [the] theory of Plato’s development [in question], since all of his ‘Socratic’ dialogues are firmly located in the earliest group. But this first sight is misleading. The central group does not at all coincide with what are called the ‘middle’ dialogues, since the intermediate group defined stylistically includes both *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus*, which are generally counted as ‘late’ from a developmental point of view. On the other hand, the ‘early’ group includes *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Cratylus*. A traditional developmentalist who recognizes that the stylistic division is chronological



ignore this plain fact, and carry on as normal; but it should at least be unsettling, for those of us who have tended to rely on the traditional early-middle-late division, to discover that, for all we know, Plato may have been writing ‘middle-period’ dialogues even while he was writing ‘early’ ones.<sup>5</sup>

My own inference from the situation as I have described it is that a re-think is needed. But in any case my collaboration with Terry Penner, and especially our work on the *Lysis*,<sup>6</sup> has convinced me that the real division among those dialogues not labelled as ‘late’—‘late’ dialogues I leave to one side, in the present context—is to be made in relation to a different theory: not the ‘theory of Forms’ (whatever we decide that that theory is, and whatever we think ‘separation’ is),<sup>7</sup> but rather a particular theory, which Aristotle recognises as Socrates’,<sup>8</sup> about *human motivation*: the theory commonly labelled as ‘intellectualism’, although the precise nature of Socratic intellectualism is frequently mis-stated and misunderstood.<sup>9</sup> The *Lysis* turns out to be a pretty single-minded

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must simply accept the fact that Plato’s stylistic and philosophical developments do not proceed at the same pace’.

<sup>5</sup> Which is merely a different way of saying what Kahn says in the last sentence cited in the preceding footnote.

<sup>6</sup> Penner and Rowe (2005).

<sup>7</sup> ‘... [Aristotle] writes as though separation is the big differentiator between Plato and Socrates’, says Gail Fine (2003). She thinks this untrue; ‘commitment to separation [‘capacity for independent existence’: 255–6] is as muted in the middle dialogues as lack of commitment to it is in the Socratic dialogues’. ‘Separation is not, however, the only feature Aristotle points to in differentiating Plato from Socrates; and perhaps other of his claims are on firmer ground. Aristotle also claims, for example, that for Socrates, unlike Plato, all universals are sensible, that is, are sensible properties. Now Plato, as we have seen, accepts NR [non-reducibility]; forms are nonsensible properties, properties non-reducible to, and indefinable in terms of, sensible properties’ (Fine, 2003, 298). It is metaphysics, then, that still seems to divide Plato from Socrates, for Fine.

<sup>8</sup> And which he seems to regard simply as false, and therefore uninteresting, and/or a mere historical relic. See e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* III.4, where the theory is dismissed as self-contradictory: ‘the consequence, for those who say that the object of wish is the good, is that what the person making an incorrect choice wishes for is not wished for (for if it is wished for, it will also be good; but in fact it may have been bad)’ (1113a17–19: how can something that is wished for—as it will be on Aristotle’s account—also *not* be wished for?). Plato’s mistake about universals (as Aristotle conceives it) is, by contrast, interesting and important. For Aristotle’s recognition of the theory dismissed in *NE* III.4 as *Socratic*, see e.g. Penner (2003) and Rowe (2003).

<sup>9</sup> For one splendidly clear statement of the general outline of the theory in question, see Taylor (2000), 62–3. This is, I suppose, what Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith (2002) have called—somewhat puzzlingly: see the second paragraph of this note—‘the traditional account of Socratic intellectualism’ (22). Brickhouse and Smith ‘attribute to Socrates a more complex moral psychology, one that retains a central tenet of ‘pure intellectualism’, namely, that no one acts contrary to what he or she believes

statement, and exploration, of the Socratic intellectualist position; and the consequence is that that position can no longer be written off<sup>10</sup> as an isolated feature, limited to a controversial argument—based on a variety of hedonism—that Socrates introduces against Protagoras at *Protagoras* 351e ff.<sup>11</sup> Once properly understood (especially with the help of the *Lysis*), intellectualism is revealed as key to the proper appreciation of the argumentation of a range of dialogues that includes the *Symposium* (and indeed other traditional ‘middle’ dialogues). Yet in Book IV of the *Republic* Socrates seems specifically to *reject* intellectualism,<sup>12</sup> and numerous other dialogues clearly imply its rejection. At the same time, whatever interpretation we put on the Platonic theory of forms, i.e. as ‘separated’ or otherwise, *that* theory seems to have rather few implications for any part of what Socrates either was about, historically, or appears to be about in any of those dialogues that it may be appropriate to label as ‘Socratic’.<sup>13</sup> Plato’s thinking about forms, or in general his thinking about metaphysics and epistemology, *by itself* tends merely to add to, and does not significantly change, the ideas that he inherited from Socrates.<sup>14</sup>

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is best, but which also assigns a specific causal role to nonrational desires’ (*ibid.*)—a role that will require reason to *control* them. If this were indeed Socrates’ view, then—I suggest—it will not merely be that ‘Plato’s mature moral psychology owes a greater debt to its Socratic predecessor than most commentators have realised’ (35); Socrates’ moral psychology will be virtually indistinguishable from that of the *Republic*. Cf. §2 below.

A specific criticism that should be made of the Brickhouse-Smith paper—which of course bears directly on the issues discussed in the present paper—is that it allows a *myth* to determine central elements in Socratic thinking. For what I myself propose to make of talk of ‘incurables’ in the myth of the *Gorgias*, see n. 42 below—and for (what I take to be) other and not dissimilar mis-statements of the essentials of Socratic intellectualism, see Cooper (1982) and Irwin (1979).

<sup>10</sup> As it is, for example, by Kahn (1996), ch. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Or, alternatively and more generally, dismissed as unworthy of a good philosopher like Plato. For a slightly more extended treatment of the issues here, see Rowe (2003b).

<sup>12</sup> I.e. in the course of arguing for the existence of three parts of the soul, one rational and two irrational, the irrational parts (respectively ‘spirited’ and ‘appetitive’) themselves being capable of causing the agent to act *even contrary to reason*. Such actions are ruled out by the ‘intellectualist’ model, according to which all desires are for the (real) good, and the only difference between agents who get things wrong and those who get things right is in the state of their beliefs. See below, esp. n. 18.

<sup>13</sup> I.e. either by the traditional criterion (i.e., showing no evidence of ‘middle period’ metaphysics) or by the criterion I am here proposing (i.e., using intellectualist premises).

<sup>14</sup> *Pace* e.g. Fine (2003). See Rowe (2005).

Given all of this, the dialogues in question<sup>15</sup> will still tend naturally to fall into two groups—not, now, by the Aristotelian (metaphysical) criterion, but rather according to whether they (a) presuppose, explore, or otherwise make use of, or alternatively (b) reject or ignore this (apparently) Socratic theory. *The* turning-point in Plato, both in terms of his relationship to Socrates and, I propose, in general,<sup>16</sup> is marked by that moment when he ceases to be interested in, and indeed positively begins to argue against, that theory.<sup>17</sup> If it is true that there are ‘intellectualist’ dialogues, on the one hand, and ‘non-intellectualist’ (or ‘anti-intellectualist’) dialogues on the other, the easiest hypothesis seems to be that Plato began by thinking the Socratic position powerful, and central (for in numerous dialogues it *is* central), but later came to think differently, and to suppose that he needed a different line, one that would improve on, make good what he had come to see as the defects of, the original Socratic account of human action. Or at any rate so I myself hypothesize.

What is this ‘intellectualist’ theory of motivation (or, perhaps better, theory of *action*; it is not just a theory of desire)? Briefly, and at bottom, it consists in the claims (a) that all human agents always and only desire the good; (b) that what they desire is the real good, not the *apparent* good; and (c) that what we do on any occasion is determined by this desire together with whatever beliefs we have about what will in fact contribute to our real good. Hence the label ‘intellectualist’: we only ever do what we *think* will be good for us. So ‘virtue [or ‘excellence’] is knowledge’, or would be if it could ever be realised, and also ‘is one’—because, if the theory is correct, and is nevertheless to make room for virtues/excellences like justice, courage, and the rest, then they must all be a matter of making the right calculations in relation to good and bad. (‘Virtue is knowledge’, then, in that it is a matter of

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<sup>15</sup> Once again, for the purposes of the present argument I continue to restrict myself to those dialogues traditionally labelled ‘early’ and ‘middle’.

<sup>16</sup> The question of what motivates us human beings is, I presume, likely to be central on anyone’s account of Plato’s philosophy; my own view is that it is, and remains, closer to the centre of Plato’s thinking than anything in the spheres of metaphysics and ontology, or of epistemology, though I recognize that I may well be in a minority in holding this.

<sup>17</sup> It is of course theoretically possible that Plato alternated: now using/applying the one sort of theory, now the other. The consequences of the two theories are, however, so large (see Rowe, 2003b, 28 ff.) that I count this as no more than a theoretical possibility.

knowledge of what is truly good and truly bad; and it is one for the same reason.) And given all of this, it will simply be impossible for anyone to do, or (as I prefer to put it) go, wrong willingly; one can only go wrong through ignorance.

*This* is what the Socrates of the *Republic* then famously denies: that is, when he argues in Book IV for the existence of two irrational parts of the soul, which can—and this is the crucial point—actually overcome reason, perhaps even knowledge. The argument in *Republic* may indeed be taken as going out of its way to underline the conflict between its conclusion and the ‘intellectualist’ position.<sup>18</sup> And the difference is quite fundamental. For if we all possess irrational elements or parts that are capable of causing us to act independently of, or even in direct contravention of, what our reason tells us to do, then it will plainly be insufficient merely to *talk* to people, in the way that the Socrates of the dialogues seems to do, in order to change their behaviour; we shall need to deal with their irrational parts as well—which will require irrational, i.e. *political*, and *rhetorical*, means. It is no accident, I propose, that a large part of the rest of the *Republic* is occupied with talk about political institutions, including a state-run education system involving what is in many respects a kind of conditioning.<sup>19</sup> How different *this* Socrates is from the essentially a-political, or un-political, Socrates of the *Apology*, or the *Crito*, or... That other Socrates claimed that what

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<sup>18</sup> At *Republic* IV, 438a–439b Socrates argues specifically that there are desires (‘appetites’) that are not good-directed (cf. n. 8 above): ‘Therefore, let no one catch us unprepared or disturb us by claiming that no one has an appetite for drink but rather good drink, nor food but good food, on the grounds that everyone after all has appetite for [‘desires’: *epithumai*] good things, so that if thirst is an appetite, it will be an appetite for good drink...’ (Socrates at 438a1–5, in the Grube/Reeve translation (Cooper, 1997)). The idea that the Book IV passage does not—as (e.g.) Reeve, Penner, Irwin and Nicholas White propose—imply ‘a denial of the Socratic view that all desire for the good, or at least the perceived good’, because it still allows that ‘to desire something includes viewing it as good’ (Hoffman (2003), 172–3), clearly fails if ‘the Socratic view’ is actually that all desire is for the [real] good, as Penner and I take to be shown beyond doubt by the *Lysis*. *Republic* VI, 505d11–e1 does not, as Hoffman claims (172) show Plato ‘clearly commit[ting] himself to the view that all desires, including appetitive desires, are for what we perceive to be good’; if ‘Plato does not believe genuine actions require the endorsement of reason’ (72, n. 5), it remains to be shown that he thinks actions that are not endorsed by reason (but caused merely by appetite) are still desired *by the agent*. This is in my view a question that cannot be settled merely by pointing out that the appetitive desire must belong to the agent; for as late as the *Laves*, Plato has a chief speaker still insisting that no one goes wrong willingly (see n. 23 below).

<sup>19</sup> Again, see Rowe (2003b).

was needed was philosophy, dialectic; thinking things through. But now that is no longer enough: one may think as much as one likes, and yet if we pay them no heed, our irrational elements may still ambush us, by night if not by day.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. *The problem of the Gorgias*

So the proposal is that the so-called ‘early’ and ‘middle’ dialogues (that is, again, all apart from the late dialogues) would be better divided—roughly speaking—into pre-*Republic* and post-*Republic*. That will, evidently, give us a new ‘early’ and a new ‘middle’, but it seems better to avoid that terminology, insofar as ‘middle’ tends to be so heavily associated with the move to the new metaphysics (‘separated’ forms, etc.). In any case, my claim is that some of the relevant dialogues feature the ‘Socratic’, intellectualist, theory of action, and some feature a radically different, if rather more familiar, kind of theory of action. I say ‘more familiar’: who nowadays would accept the Socratic ‘denial of *akrasia*’—or, to put it better, his explanation of what others, including the Plato of the *Republic*, treat as ‘lack of control’, or, in that spectacular bit of English mistranslation, ‘weakness of will’?<sup>21</sup> We moderns are ourselves liable to take it for granted that we can be *overcome* by desire—we are all used to saying ‘I don’t know what came over me’, ‘I couldn’t help it’, and so on. ‘No’, says Socrates, ‘you are wrong—you *could* help it; nothing *made* you do it. You acted as you did because of the state of your beliefs

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<sup>20</sup> See *Republic* IX, 571b4–572a1 (cited, in the Grube/Reeve translation, with omissions): ‘Some of our unnecessary pleasures and desires seem to me to be lawless. They are probably [are likely to be: *kinduneuouisi*] present in everyone, but they are held in check by the laws and by the better desires in alliance with reason. In a few people, they have been eliminated entirely or only a few weak ones remain, while in others they are stronger and more numerous. What desires do you mean? Those that are awakened in sleep, when the rest of the soul—the rational, gentle, and ruling part—slumbers. Then the beastly and savage part, full of drink, casts off sleep and seeks to find a way to gratify itself ... On the other hand, I suppose that someone who is healthy and moderate with himself goes to sleep only after having done the following: First, he rouses his rational part and feasts it on fine arguments and speculations; second, he neither starves nor feasts his appetites, so that they will slumber and not disturb his best part with either pleasure or their pain...’

<sup>21</sup> Mistranslation, because it presupposes either that the Greeks had a concept of the will, or that any true picture of the world must inevitably make room for such a concept. Both presuppositions are questionable, to the extent that the concept of the will only surfaced centuries later, to provide for the resolution of mental conflicts—conflicts, that is, of just the sort whose existence Socrates, and others (notably the Stoics), deny.

(so, if you don't like what you did, you'd better do something about your beliefs).' Or so he would respond in the ambit of some of the dialogues (the ones I am proposing to call truly 'Socratic', including the *Symposium*—that old 'middle' dialogue, which is nonetheless thoroughly *intellectualist* in its treatment of human behaviour);<sup>22</sup> in others, (perhaps) starting from the *Republic*, it looks as if he comes more over to what I have called the familiar modern position—though even then he will be rather less inclined than we often are to accept it as any sort of *defence* that 'something came over me'. ('Pull yourself together!' will be his response—even while apparently still holding that such cases are, in Aristotelian terms, involuntary.<sup>23</sup> But of course, as the *Republic* shows, he thinks that some will be more capable of pulling *themselves* together than others; others will need external help.)

Now in this whole context, the *Gorgias* may well seem to be something of an anomaly.<sup>24</sup> For on the one hand the *Gorgias* contains one of the most spectacular applications of the Socratic theory of action, in the shape of Socrates' claim that orators and tyrants *have no power*—a claim from which he not only never retreats, in the rest of

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<sup>22</sup> So that, strikingly, passionate or romantic love, *erôs*, can be described (by Socrates and the priestess Diotima) without any recourse to the concept of irrational, non-good-directed desires.

<sup>23</sup> Just so Socrates' counterpart as main speaker in the *Laws* is still to be found insisting, Socratically, that 'no one does/goes wrong willingly' (*Laws* V, 731c [no one commits injustice willingly], 734b [everyone is *akolastos* unwillingly]; IX, 860d [all bad people are bad, with respect to everything, unwillingly]). It is what is *really* good that at least some part even of the Platonic divided soul still desires.

<sup>24</sup> Vlastos (1991, ch. 2) treats the *Gorgias* as straightforwardly one of 'the dialogues of Plato's earlier period' (46); evidently he misses the problem that I here identify—which suggests at least some kind of *transitional* status for the *Gorgias*. For Vlastos, 'transitional' dialogues are early ones that are merely missing the 'elenchus' according to his unnecessarily narrow notion of 'elenchus' (i.e. 'examination', 'challenge', '(attempt at) refutation', which actually appears to be a standard part of Plato's notion of philosophical method: see e.g. Penner and Rowe (2005)). Fine treats the *Gorgias* as 'transitional' (2003, 1), but she does not state her grounds for doing so. From the perspective of the present series of papers, however, the most important reference will be to Irwin's commentary on the *Gorgias* (Irwin, 1979), which sees the dialogue as using, and failing to reconcile, two different approaches to desires and their relationship to good: '1/ The unhealthy soul has a faulty conception of its good, and needs to be restrained because otherwise its desires—all good-dependent—will mislead it. 2/ Its strong good-independent desires make it incontinent ['weak-willed'], so that it needs control. . . The conclusions of [the] two lines of argument [depending on these different approaches] in the dialogue are never satisfactorily reconciled' (218). What the present paper, and the third in the series to which it belongs, i.e. Rowe (forthcoming), set out to resist is something very like Irwin's account here; though I differ significantly in the way I state 1/, the Socratic position. See following note.

the dialogue, but on which he seems to build even more surprising, paradoxical, even (apparently) comical claims. Those apparently enviable people, who—so Gorgias has claimed—can do whatever they want, in fact—Socrates says—do *nothing* they want, only what seems best to them. ‘How ridiculous!’ responds Polus. But of course Socrates is perfectly serious: they *don’t* do what they want. Why not? Because they don’t have the knowledge to enable them to distinguish properly between good and bad, and lacking that, they fail to get what is really good for them—which must be what they want; *doesn’t* everyone want what is really good for them? Who ever was satisfied with what merely *seems* good, and isn’t in fact so? This, surely, is the full Socratic position.<sup>25</sup>

Yet on the other hand—and this is what makes the dialogue seem anomalous—the *Gorgias* is likely, to most readers, to look in significant respects significantly un-Socratic. Perhaps most of all,<sup>26</sup> it appears an un-Socratically *political* dialogue.<sup>27</sup> This is not just because of all that talk about tyrants and orators, though it is also because of that; it is especially (and here I arrive finally at the subject announced in the title of the present paper) because it has so much to say on the subject of, and indeed about the *necessity* for, punishment. People will be worse off if they commit injustice than if they have it done to them, Socrates claims; they will be even worse off if they commit injustice and are not punished for it; any rhetorical skills they have will therefore be most

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<sup>25</sup> See Penner (1991). One absolutely crucial difference between Penner’s and Irwin’s interpretations of Socrates’ position is that Penner sees it as insisting—however paradoxically—that we *only* desire what is *really* good for us. Insofar as Irwin talks—in the passage cited in the preceding note—of [‘good-dependent’] desires as potentially ‘misleading’ the soul, and so apparently being responsible for its ‘faulty conception of its good’, he evidently does not take this line. (‘Good-dependent’, then, will have a distinctly weaker force than in Penner’s interpretation: see n. 33 below.) My own interpretation follows Penner’s, and not Irwin’s.

<sup>26</sup> Another apparently non-Socratic element will be the use Socrates makes, in his argument with Callicles, of the notion of *self-control*. But see Cooper (1982), and Rowe (forthcoming).

<sup>27</sup> The Socrates of the *Gorgias*, as one of Vlastos’s ‘dialogues of Plato’s earlier period’, ought to lack that ‘elaborate political theory [sc. of the *Republic*] whose ranking order of constitutions places democracy with the worst of contemporary forms of government, lower than timocracy and oligarchy, preferable only to lawless tyranny’ (Vlastos, 1991). That, I suppose, he does lack; yet in political terms the *Gorgias* goes far beyond the *Crito*, which Vlastos seems to take as defining the political dimension of the ‘early’ dialogues—not least in virtue of that stunning moment, at (*Gorgias*) 521–522, to which I shall refer briefly in §3 below, when Socrates claims to be—perhaps—the only true statesman alive. It is surely less far from here to the philosopher-ruler of the *Republic* than it is to citizen Socrates in the *Crito*.

beneficially employed if used to bring themselves and their family and friends to justice, and punishment. And punishment then figures strongly, again, in the chilling myth with which Socrates closes: after death, if we are to believe him (and he claims to believe the story himself), the unjust will be judged, and will suffer appropriately for their injustice; if they are incurable, they will suffer for eternity.<sup>28</sup> But, one may well ask, if it is all supposed to be a matter of intellectual error, what use is it to *punish* anyone?<sup>29</sup> It is clear from Socrates' argument that he is seeing punishment as something that improves people, reforms them. But how can making people suffer—fining, imprisoning, flogging, exiling, executing them—how can any of *that* make them *think* better? It might make them abstain next time the occasion arises, out of fear. Or maybe, we might claim, punishment can help change people's characters, by the same sort of conditioning process that is envisaged in the account of primary education in *Republic* II and III. Make people live under certain conditions, and they will come to desire the right things, taking on the right sorts of beliefs along with those right desires. (Or so one hopes; though the image of Gyges and his magic ring clearly raises the question—and is meant to raise it: *what if* one were perfectly secure from detection, and generally from paying the price? On the Socratic model, it will make no difference unless detection, and the threat of punishment, happened to be all that was holding someone back from injustice—which might happen, but would not be the natural state of affairs; the *Republic* IV model, by contrast, seems to concede a natural tendency towards *pleonexia*.)<sup>30</sup>

The problem, as should be immediately apparent, is that this kind of view of punishment seems already to take us most of the way over to a *Republic* IV psychology—one where it is not just the state of our beliefs that determines the way we behave, as on the Socratic model, but the state of our beliefs *and* of our desires; because our desires, so to speak, can cause as much trouble as our beliefs. On the Socratic model, the desire that lies behind every action (a slightly different, and more accurate, formulation from the one I used before) is the desire

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<sup>28</sup> No one, I trust, will challenge this pencil sketch of parts of Socrates' argument in the *Gorgias*.

<sup>29</sup> The problem is seen, and clearly stated, by Brickhouse and Smith (2002) though their solution is different: for them, Socrates' own position is actually such as to allow room for, indeed actually to require, punishment.

<sup>30</sup> *Pleonexia*: grasping, or having, more than one's share.



for the real good; on this new, *Republic*-type model, we have non-good-directed desires which are themselves capable of causing us to act—so that our *desires as well as our reason needs persuasion, education, direction*. That is where punishment comes in, as a suitably irrational way of dealing with irrational drives. The difference between the two models is plainly fundamental.<sup>31</sup> How then (and this is my problem) can they co-exist in a single Platonic dialogue—as they appear to co-exist in the *Gorgias*?

### 3. *A suggested solution*

Anglophone readers are used to treating certain dialogues as ‘transitional’—that is, between ‘early’ and ‘middle’.<sup>32</sup> Why should we not then explain the apparent tensions in the *Gorgias* by supposing that the process of transition was a slow one, in which Plato went on clinging to the old model of human psychology while already attracted by the new? The reason is that it involves attributing a certain *confusion* to the author, Plato; and moreover a confusion that ought to have been immediately recognizable to him, or indeed to anyone.<sup>33</sup> The two models are, simply,

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<sup>31</sup> To put it in a nutshell: according to the Socratic model, as I represent it, the only reliable way of changing people’s behaviour is by talking to them—because their behaviour is determined by their beliefs, and punishment will not reliably help change beliefs; according to the *Republic*-type model, talking by itself will do no good, because our behaviour also depends on the state of our non-rational desires, which are only susceptible to force, not reason. It is not at all clear to me why Brickhouse and Smith (2002) claim that ‘[c]orporal punishments... give habitual wrongdoers especially powerful reasons not to engage in wrongdoing’ (30–1); such punishments will surely only have an effect if they follow automatically on ‘wrongdoing’, which they notoriously do not. ‘Habitual wrongdoers’, one would have thought, tend to become rather adept at calculating the risk of detection (as Plato himself seems to recognize when he introduces the Gyges story); deterrence seems to work best with non-habitual ‘wrongdoers’.

<sup>32</sup> See n. 24 above.

<sup>33</sup> The general point is raised, at length and with eloquence, by Cooper (1982): ‘What is one then to make of Socrates, the character in this dialogue, and of Plato, its author? Are they unaware of [the] contradiction [i.e., the sort of contradiction Irwin, in n. 25 above, was quoted as attributing to the Socrates of the *Gorgias*]? One would think these questions would occur to any intelligent reader of Irwin’s Notes... Presumably he thinks that Socrates, at least, is unaware of the contradiction; to think otherwise is to make a mockery of Socrates’ central requirement in philosophizing, a rigid adherence to logical consistency...’ (579–80). According to Cooper, the Socrates of the *Gorgias* retains his consistency by carefully avoiding endorsement of certain aspects of Callicles’ position (my own approach, below, will be along somewhat similar lines); the dialogue is indeed transitional, for Cooper, but only insofar as Plato is already sketching aspects of his *Republic* theory of action in the shape of *Callicles*’ assumptions (see 585). Cooper, incidentally, seems to share Irwin’s view about the Socratic position

incompatible. So we seem to need some other explanation. I believe that there is an alternative available; and in the remaining part of this short paper, I shall simply outline that alternative.

The theme of *punishment* seems to surface as a distinct topic at 469a, when Socrates declares that the person who *kills someone justly*, while not being miserable, *athlios*, is nevertheless not enviable. We might suppose that killing people justly, i.e., presumably, executing people who deserve to die, is hardly a Socratic thing to do; still, it was not Socrates who brought up the subject of killing, but Gorgias, and then Polus—and all Socrates wants to do here, at 469a, is to draw up a list of things in rough order of desirability: killing people unjustly makes one *athlios*, i.e. the opposite of happy, and while being killed unjustly does not contribute to one's happiness, it is less unfortunate either than killing unjustly or being killed justly; similarly with killing justly (if it does not bring 'misery'). At around this point (470a), Socrates gets Polus to agree that being punished is a bad thing; but that is only in order to show him that good and bad are *his*, Polus', own criteria of desirability and undesirability as much as they are Socrates' (470a–b). Then Socrates shows his hand: happiness is a matter of being fine and good, unhappiness a matter of injustice and badness (470e)—which provokes Polus into bringing in his key witness, Archelaus, king of Macedon: supremely unjust and bad, but, Polus claims, supremely happy (471a–d). So the battle-lines are drawn, along with the two men's respective positions on punishment: Socrates thinks it a good thing for people to be punished if they are unjust, on the grounds that that will make them better people (and so happier); Polus thinks punishment simply *bad* (472e). And so everything is set for Polus' refutation. What I draw attention to, in this context, is just that it is one of the basic premises of that

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on desire: '...Socrates goes further [sc. than simply claiming, as the Stoics did, that 'human beings only act after 'assenting' to the proposition that what they are doing is for the best']. He maintains... a thesis about desire...: every desire is for its possessor's overall good (perhaps, of course, on a mistaken conception of what that good consists in). Irwin calls this second thesis a thesis about the 'good-dependence' of all desires. But of course Socrates is not saying that all the desires we experience conform to and derive from ('depend upon') our *considered view* of where our good lies. In fact the dependence runs in the other direction: *whatever* desire we have, in having it we judge that whatever it is the desire for will contribute to our overall good...' (582–3; Cooper's italics). By contrast, on the Penner interpretation (to which I subscribe) Socrates will hold that it is only our *beliefs* that are mistaken, and our beliefs are not determined by our desires—because, again, all desires are for the *real* good. Clearly such a position will raise some complex issues, but this is not the place to discuss them.

refutation that punishment will improve the soul; later on, Socrates will argue that even *dying*, i.e. being executed, will be better for the unjust than continuing to live an unjust life (so far, it has been put on a par with living unjustly).

This already means that Polus and Socrates are taking punishment in different ways. Polus takes it just as involving suffering for the person being punished; Socrates sees it as a means to improvement. But there is, nevertheless, nothing so far to stop them having the same kinds of punishment in mind: fines, flogging—and certainly, Socrates is still talking about execution, which seems to put the general point beyond doubt. So then we *are*, apparently, already in a *Republic*-type context, where punishment is likely to be seen primarily in terms of conditioning, and perhaps deterrence. Why else would flogging, or imprisonment, be thought to help with anything? That, however, we should notice, is not how Socrates argues his case. Rather, he builds on Polus' admission, in 473e–475e,<sup>34</sup> that the fine is the good or the pleasant (or both), to bring him to agree—or to see?—that just punishment must be beneficial (it is plainly not *pleasant*); and the final move is to use an analogy with medical treatment to suggest that such punishment is beneficial insofar as it 'cures' the 'patient' of his injustice.

And there are several interesting things about the way this move is made. The first is that again Socrates gets Polus to make the running: what is the *technē* that frees us from badness and injustice (as medicine frees us from sickness), he asks:

Or if you can't answer just like that, look at it like this: ...to whom do we take those that are sick in their bodies?—To the doctors.—And where do we take those who are unjust and *a-kolastoi* ['unrestrained'/'uncorrected'/'unpunished']?—To the judges, do you mean?—In order to pay the penalty for their crimes (*dikēn didonai*)?—That's what I say.—So don't those who punish (*kolazein*) correctly punish by employing a sort of justice (*dikaiosunē tis*)?—Clearly.—So...medicine frees us from sickness, and justice (*dikē*) frees us from *akolasia* and injustice. (478a1–b1)<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> It is this passage that is the focus of the second paper in the present series of papers, Rowe (2005b).

<sup>35</sup> Εἰ μὴ οὕτως εὐπορεῖς, ὧδε σκόπει· ποῖ ἄγομεν καὶ παρὰ τίνας τοὺς κάμνοντας τὰ σώματα;—ΠΩΛ. Παρὰ τοὺς ἰατρούς, ὦ Σώκρατες.—ΣΩ. Ποῖ δὲ τοὺς ἀδικούντας καὶ τοὺς ἀκολασταίνοντας;—ΠΩΛ. Παρὰ τοὺς δικαστὰς λέγεις;—ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν δίκην δώσοντας;—ΠΩΛ. Φημί.—ΣΩ. Ἄρ' οὖν οὐ δικαιοσύνην τινὶ χρώμενοι κολάζουσιν οἱ ὀρθῶς κολάζοντες; ΠΩΛ. Δήλον δῆ.—ΣΩ. Χρηματιστικὴ μὲν ἄρα πενίας ἀπαλλάττει, ἱατρικὴ δὲ νόσου, δίκη δὲ ἀκολασίας καὶ ἀδικίας.

What is particularly striking here is the way Socrates actually refrains from endorsing Polus' proposal that judges are like doctors; he then says only that judges punish by using a *sort of* justice. (That itself might be interpreted as a deliberate *refusal* to endorse Polus' suggestion. In any case, Socrates' turn of phrase here needs explanation.) And then, as he moves on from the conclusion about what justice, *dikê*, does for those it punishes, we find Socrates combining the language of 'punishment' and 'paying the penalty' with a quite different sort of language: that of *admonition*. Thus at 478e3–4, he talks about the person being relieved of his injustice (*adikia*) as *nouthetoumenos*, 'being admonished', and *epiplêttomenos*,<sup>36</sup> as well as 'paying his due', *dikên didous*—and uses these descriptions in that order; then at 478e6–479a1, *noutheteisthai* is combined with *kolazesthai* and *dikên didonai*. What is significant about this is that *nouthetein*, in another famous passage, is *contrasted* with 'punishing', *kolazein*: this at *Apology* 26a, where Socrates says that if he did what he is accused of without meaning to, then he needs someone to teach and *nouthetein* him rather than *kolasis*.

So what, someone might say: look at *Laws* 879d, where there is talk of *nouthetein*, 'admonishing', *by means of a beating* (*plêgais*). That just goes to show—the objector might continue—that we shouldn't read too much into 478–9. To which I respond that, if we look closely at the *Gorgias* as a whole, there are other clear indications that Socrates holds back from any straightforward acceptance of legal punishment as a means to the improvement of men's souls; or at any rate, *that he has a rival kind of 'justice' and 'punishment' on offer*. (Hence the 'sort of' at 478a; but more of that in a moment.) (1) At 505c, when Callicles proposes to retire from the discussion, Socrates remarks that 'this person won't put up with being helped, and himself having done to him what we are talking about, being *punished* (*kolazomenos*)'. So Socratic dialectic is, apparently, a kind of punishment. Mere metaphor, perhaps; but then see (2) 509b–e. Socrates here argues that what we need above all is a defence (*boêtheia*), both for oneself and for one's own, against the worst thing of all: injustice. It isn't enough merely to wish not to act unjustly, any more than it is enough merely to *wish* not to be treated unjustly; one must get 'a certain power (*dunamis*) and expertise (*technê* [i.e., I take

<sup>36</sup> Now *epiplêttein* can be a matter of *beating* (thus Zeyl renders *epiplêttomenos* as 'get[ting] lashed'); but it can also be 'rebuke'—and the ambiguity, after the use of *nouthetein*, is perhaps particularly acute.

it, a power that consists in a *technê*]), since if one doesn't learn whatever it is (*auta*) and practice it, one will act unjustly' (509d8–e2). And finally, Socrates rather puzzlingly refers to a 'previous agreement' (e4) that no one commits an injustice (*adikei*) willingly, or in wishing it.<sup>37</sup> All of this surely strongly suggests, and is meant to suggest, that what Socrates thinks we need is what he so often says we need: *knowledge*. So it is, in that climactic passage at 521d–522a, that he claims to be the only person to *epicheirein* true *politikê*, 'set his hand to true political expertise', because what he says aims at what is best rather than at what is most pleasant, comparing *himself*, this time, to the—expert, knowledgeable—doctor, who makes his patients suffer to get well (punishes them?). (In translating *epicheirein* as 'set one's hand to', I have in mind something like 'attempt', 'aim at'; the Hackett translator's 'take up' seems to me to miss the point.)

The contrast here, of course, is with rhetoric; and that, I believe, takes us straight back to that well-known, and difficult, passage at 464b–465c, where Socrates, talking to Gorgias, opposes political expertise, *politikê*, as consisting of the science of legislation, *nomothetikê*, and justice, *dikaiousunê*, to 'sophistic' (*sophistikê*) and rhetoric. Exactly how we are intended to take these pairings, and the two contrasts (i.e. *nomothetikê/sophistikê* and *dikaiousunê/rhetorikê*), is not immediately clear, but here is a suggestion which appears to me to do justice to at least most of the phenomena of text and context: *nomothetikê*, being to the soul what the art of physical training, *gumnastikê*, is to the body, is that expertise (*technê*), whatever it is, that makes people/souls good, and *dikaiousunê*, 'justice', being to souls what medicine is to the body, is that *technê*, whatever it is, that puts souls to right when they go wrong. Now for Gorgias, and for Polus, the first of these expertises will be straightforwardly identifiable with the art of the lawgiver; and maybe that is right. But when Socrates claims to be the only person trying for *politikê*, he will implicitly be setting himself up in competition with the lawgiver.<sup>38</sup> He will be competing with the lawgiver not just because he appropriates the name *politikos*, but because what he specifically claims to do, in 521d–522a, is to (try to) make his

<sup>37</sup> I.e. *boulomenos*. For that 'previous agreement', Irwin (1979), *ad loc.* compares 480a, and comments 'But 467c–468e did not prove this. Socrates must mean that since they have found that injustice is bad for the agent, only people who do not know this will do injustice...'

<sup>38</sup> Much, perhaps, as the ideal statesman does in the *Politicus*, with the difference that that ideal person will actually *possess* the relevant expertise.

fellow-citizens into better people (which is, again, how I take *nomothetikê* to be understood because of its pairing with *gumnastikê*). Now admittedly, as I have said, in 521d–522a he compares himself as *politikos* with the *doctor*, which in terms of the pairings and contrasts back in 464–5 ought to make him an expert in *dikaiosunê*, justice, rather than in the legislator's expertise or *nomothetikê*. And that, as we have seen, is how he has in fact represented himself, to Callicles (as 'punishing' him, *kolazôn*). But his wording in 521d7–8 perhaps does suggest the wider claim, i.e. to expertise *both* in *nomothetikê* and in *dikaiosunê*: he is the only person 'to attempt the true art of politics and to practice politics'. The two *technai* are, presumably, or involve, the same sort of knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

In short, *that* is why we have that reference to the judges' justice as a 'sort of' justice at 478a: 'So don't those who punish (*kolazein*) correctly punish by employing a *sort of justice*?'. 'Punishment', or *kolazein*, for Socrates, is not a matter for the courts but for *philosophical dialectic*. So then, someone might reasonably ask, why on earth should he couch all that long argument with Polus, and then with Callicles, in terms of punishment as normally understood? Well, that perhaps is a question we should have to raise in any case, since Socrates has no reason to believe that punishment as normally understood made anyone any better, and Polus evidently doesn't believe it—if he did, he would hardly treat Socrates' conclusion about the benefits of punishment with quite such incredulity. The reason why Socrates mounts his argument in the terms he does is, I propose, quite simple: it is because they are the terms his opponents, or interlocutors, can readily understand (even if they scornfully reject the ideas he uses to frame them). Similarly with that basic analysis around which so much in the conversation with Polus turns, of 'fine', *kalon*, into either good or pleasant or both.<sup>40</sup> But at the same time there is also nothing that is not also true when we substitute *Socrates'* conception of punishment for the ordinary one; or

<sup>39</sup> And after all, back in 465 we were told that sophists and orators are 'muddled up together in the same territory and on the same subjects...and don't know what to make of each other, nor do others know what to make of them' (465c4–7); at 520a6–7, sophist and orator 'are the same thing, or something close to that—the same sort of thing'. Perhaps we can suppose a similar 'muddle', or 'jumbling' (*phuresthai*), between *nomothetikê* and *dikaiosunê*: there *are* two different functions, i.e. making people better people and mending them when they go wrong; but in Socrates' case the two functions merge into one.

<sup>40</sup> This is not, however, to say that Socrates is in either case *merely* relying on what Polus will accept; his argument is not merely *ad hominem* (see immediately below, and following note).

rather, to put it more strongly, Socrates' argument strictly only *becomes* true once his conception of punishment ('punishment') is substituted for the ordinary one. (Punishment—'punishment'—of the ordinary kind in fact does not make people better; certainly not, if 'better' is 'more knowledgeable', 'wiser'.) People will be better off if their unhealthy souls submit to the medicine of dialectic; and yes, they should use all their powers of persuasion to get their family and friends, and themselves, to take the same medicine (in which case, of course, those powers of persuasion will themselves have little to do with *rhetoric* as ordinarily understood).<sup>41</sup>

The dialogue as a whole is an illustration of that Socratic, dialectical, counterpart to rhetoric. And the myth is part of that dialectic. What it says is true, Socrates seems to claim (523a)—but by that he clearly doesn't intend to say that the story/account is *literally* true. After all, at 481a–b he seems to have shown that he thinks injustice dies with its possessor—which is precisely what the myth suggests it *doesn't* do. (Socrates was arguing back then, in 481, however jocularly, that if you are going to do harm to anyone, one of things you should do is to make sure, if they are unjust, that they will live as long as possible.) Rather, Socrates means that what the myth *says* is true; or, as we might put it, its *moral* is true. And its moral is straightforward: that if one removes the apparent material gains the unjust can make, injustice brings misery, and the worst injustice brings the worst misery. For his message, Socrates again borrows the language of punishment, though of course a Callicles would not, in this case, use it himself: for someone intelligent like him, all that talk about our being punished in Hades will be stuff and nonsense (that is the point of Socrates' suggestion that Callicles will think it all a mere story: 522e). Nevertheless, the language will be intelligible to him, and the message itself unmistakable.<sup>42</sup>

There is clearly much more to be said about all of this—and particularly about the kind of *authorial strategy* that it implies. (What advantage

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<sup>41</sup> On fine as good or pleasant or both: this too is something Socrates can live with, *on his own terms* (as I argue in Rowe (2005b)).

<sup>42</sup> That there are *incurable* criminals in Hades is, I think, itself part of what Socrates is appropriating—Callicles himself, Socrates suggests, will be persuaded eventually—see 513c–d; and if Callicles, why not anybody? Or, just possibly, the 'incurables' are those who, like Archelaus, are never in fact 'cured' of their injustice. *Their* suffering is unmixed and, in a sense, without an end except that brought by death. (And of course an Archelaus is as much a supreme exemplar for Socrates as he is for Polus: here is someone who did the worst things, and, from Socrates' perspective, lived the worst kind of life.)

is there in putting things in terms one's interlocutors understand, if that means that they fail completely to understand what is really going on? Is that any sort of 'dialectic', any sort of real *conversation*?)<sup>43</sup> But I hope I have at least begun the task of what one might call saving the *Gorgias* for Socrates. My conclusion is that the Socrates of the *Gorgias* does not endorse flogging, imprisonment, or any other vulgar kind of punishment. From this point of view, there is nothing 'transitional' about the dialogue, and we have no need to charge its author with 'confusion'.<sup>44</sup> His Socrates continues to think that what people need is *talk*. That, as I propose, is exactly what is behind that arresting claim he makes to be—perhaps—the only person practising the political art: ordinary politics (sc. including its judicial arm) fails to achieve what politics should achieve—making people better; only he, Socrates, properly understands how to do that, and actually sets about doing it.

*Postscript: 'ruling oneself'*

All of the above, however, may well seem to be put in jeopardy by one other feature of the *Gorgias* which must appear, even on my own account, quite patently un-Socratic. How is it, an objector might ask, that someone who, like the Socrates I have described, firmly believes in an undivided self (or soul), can talk about the need to *rule oneself*—and about the need to establish some kind of 'order' in one's soul—in the way that he apparently does for much of the conversation with Callicles in the last act of the dialogue? Others<sup>45</sup> have attempted an explanation, but on the basis of a rather different account of the Socratic position from the one that I have proposed. The alternative account of that position which I have proposed in fact makes the project of reconciliation more difficult, insofar as it leaves no conceivable part or aspect of the soul available to be ruled or controlled (that is, if *all* desires are good).

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<sup>43</sup> I shall confront these questions in my forthcoming book *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing*. Meanwhile, it will have to suffice to point out (a) that Plato's audience would not inevitably be made up of Poluses and Callicleses; and (b) that the options, for someone who sees the world, and uses language, in quite different ways from ordinary people, are somewhat limited. What our author does (I claim) is to write in a manner that seems to fit both perspectives—while actually only properly fitting one: that is, as he sees it, the correct one.

<sup>44</sup> See nn. 33, 34 above, with the text to those notes.

<sup>45</sup> Specifically Cooper (1982), and then Brickhouse and Smith (2002).



I borrow,<sup>46</sup> and append, the following paragraphs in order to sketch in outline how I propose to bridge this gap in my argument.

How to explain the phenomena—that talk about ‘ruling oneself’ and about the need for ‘psychic order’—on the alternative version of the Socratic theory that I have recommended? The main part of the answer is simple: Socrates specifically introduces the idea of ‘ruling oneself’ in terms of what *the many* think.

—I’m talking about each [ruler] ruling himself [says Socrates]. Or shouldn’t he do this at all, rule himself, but only rule the others?—What are you talking about, ‘ruling himself’? [replies Callicles].—Nothing complicated, but *just as the many say*, temperate (*sôphrôn*), master of himself (*enkratês*), ruling the pleasures and appetites within him. (491d7–e1)<sup>47</sup>

The effect of this exchange—so I propose—is to move the debate on to Callicles’ territory, insofar as he accepts the same sort of model of human nature (reason on the one side, [‘good-independent’] desires on the other) as ‘the many’, even though he claims to reject the standards of behaviour they base on it.

But what Callicles and the many see in terms of ‘controlling one’s pleasures and desires’ Socrates may—will—have his own way of understanding, and describing. Something of that special way of understanding surfaces at 500a, when Socrates asks Callicles to agree to the suggestion, originally accepted by Polus in 467–8, that just as we should do things—actions—for the sake of good ends (a special Socratic idea if ever there was one), so we should also do *pleasant* things for the sake of good things. Of course Callicles knows how he reads this, and Socrates knows how Callicles will read it (that is, without making any clear distinction between the pleasures afforded and the goods derived); but equally, because of the connection with 467–8, which Socrates himself makes with some care, we know how differently Socrates will read it. Once we do read 500a with that earlier passage, we are forced to integrate it with Socrates’ general account of the good, and so of human motivation. (The pleasantness of a thing, he will be saying, is never an adequate reason for choosing it; to suppose otherwise will be a mistake about the nature of the good.)

<sup>46</sup> I.e. from Rowe (forthcoming).

<sup>47</sup> —ΣΩ. “Ἐνα ἕκαστον λέγω αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα· ἢ τοῦτο μὲν οὐδὲν δεῖ, αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχειν, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων;—ΚΑΛ. Πῶς ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα λέγεις;—ΣΩ. Οὐδὲν ποικίλον ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοί, σάφρονα ὄντα καὶ ἐγκρατῆ αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ, τῶν ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν ἄρχοντα τῶν ἐν ἑαυτοῦ.

Similarly with the idea of psychic order—*taxis* and *kosmos*.<sup>48</sup> In 503e–504a, in talking about how craftsmen put their materials in order (*eis taxin*, e6), Socrates speaks of their fitting different parts together (‘...each...compels one thing to be fitting and suitable to another...’), and then passes to the soul via the body, where again ‘ordering’ might be thought of as a matter of fitting parts together (adjusting the proportions of different elements); it is then easy enough to understand his treatment of the *soul* in the same terms, especially when he introduces the ‘lawful’ and ‘law’ as what brings about psychic order. (That is, we seem to be, still, on the familiar ground occupied by the many, and by Callicles: reason versus desire.) But even as he does this, he also takes us *away* from the familiar.

—And for the structurings<sup>49</sup> and orderings of the soul the name is ‘lawful’ and ‘law’, from which people become lawful and orderly; and these [?] are justice and temperance<sup>50</sup> (*sôphrosunê*). Do you say so, or not?—Let it be so.—Then won’t that rhetor, the craftsman, the good one,<sup>51</sup> look to these things when he applies whatever speeches he makes to souls,..., and when he gives whatever he gives, and when he takes away whatever he takes away? He’ll always have his mind on this; to see that the souls of the citizens acquire justice and get rid of injustice... (504d1–e2)<sup>52</sup>

Here, we are back with the justice, *dikaiousunê*, which is a part of *politikê*, the statesman’s expertise, improving people’s souls just as the medical doctor heals their bodies; back too with Gorgias’ orator, who knows

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Cooper (1982), 584: ‘The notion of ‘psychic order’ Socrates [503d–505b, with 506e–507a] argues for is perfectly compatible with his usual theory of action and motivation, because as he explains it, it is all a question of different desires in appropriate strengths and frequencies...’. The passages in question actually have very little directly to say about *this* idea, though they may be compatible with it. See below.

<sup>49</sup> Irwin prefers ‘structures’ for *taxis* here, but as he obviously accepts, the point is clearly about ordering, not just about order.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Temperance’ is here a mere place-filler for *sôphrosunê* (which, in the context, will be ambiguous between ‘self-control’ [what it will denote for Callicles, and most people] and something like ‘good sense’—or just ‘wisdom’ [what it will be likely to denote for Socrates]).

<sup>51</sup> That is, the *good*, expert orator.

<sup>52</sup> —ΣΩ. ταῖς δὲ γε τῆς ψυχῆς τάξεσι καὶ κοσμήσεσιν νόμιμόν τε καὶ νόμος, ὅθεν καὶ νόμιμοι γίνονται καὶ κόσμιοι· ταῦτα δ’ ἔστιν δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ σωφροσύνη. φῆς ἢ οὐ;—ΚΑΛ. Ἔστω.—ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν πρὸς ταῦτα βλέπων ὁ ῥήτωρ ἐκεῖνος, ὁ τεχνικός τε καὶ ἀγαθός, καὶ τοὺς λόγους προσοίσει ταῖς ψυχαῖς οὓς ἂν λέγῃ, καὶ τὰς πράξεις ἀπάσας, καὶ δῶρον ἕαν τι διδῶ, δώσει, καὶ ἕαν τι ἀφαιρῇται, ἀφαιρήσεται, πρὸς τοῦτο αἰεὶ τὸν νοῦν ἔχων, ὅπως ἂν αὐτοῦ τοῖς πολίταις δικαιοσύνη μὲν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς γίγνηται, ἀδικία δὲ ἀπαλλάττηται,...

about justice and so brings about justice in others.<sup>53</sup> But that is not, of course, what real orators are like. Socrates has suddenly shifted to talking about what orators *should* be; just as he will go on to talk about what politicians should be—i.e., like himself, the true ‘doctor’ of souls, telling people the straightforward truth (521d–522a). And that suggests a different kind of ‘justice’ altogether, and an altogether different kind of talk: dialectic, not rhetoric.<sup>54</sup> The rest of the argument here in 503–5<sup>55</sup> has its own version of that same analogy as in 521–2: doctors don’t give ‘lots of food or drink, and the pleasantest’ (504e7–8) to their sick patients; they actually prevent them from filling themselves up with what they desire. Just so with the soul: ‘as long as it is corrupt, by being senseless [without *nous*: *anoêtos*], intemperate, unjust, and impious, we should restrain it from its appetites, and not allow it to do anything else except what will make it better’ (505b2–4). Or, to put it another way, 521–522 tells us how *Socrates*, or a Socratic expert, would handle sick souls.

But how, one might ask, will talking to people ‘restrain their appetites’? Does Socrates really suppose that people’s passions can be controlled by merely *reasoning* with them? (Isn’t that just too implausible?) These are, I respond, badly formed questions. Socrates’ theory just does not allow for appetites getting out of hand, by themselves. If someone has what we are inclined to call an insatiable appetite, Socrates will stay firm, and call even *that* a matter of intellectual error: the person just has the wrong beliefs about the good—he believes passionately, as it were, that the so-called objects of his appetite are the things to go for. This is how he will understand the Calliclean individual. We, and Callicles, will analyse this person’s situation in terms of passion, even of passion overcoming reason; and that is why we will talk about the need to ‘restrain his desires’, and Callicles will applaud him for not restraining them.<sup>56</sup> And these are the terms in which Socrates chooses to frame his argument. But he does not *endorse* those terms. Those people who have souls in bad condition do not, on Socrates’ account, desire what they say they desire; what they really desire they don’t know at all.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Gorgias* 460a ff.

<sup>54</sup> For a fuller treatment of this proposal, see §3 of the main part of this paper.

<sup>55</sup> The conclusion is at 505b11–12: ‘Thus being tempered (or ‘punished’: *kolazesthai*) is better for the soul than intemperance (...)’.

<sup>56</sup> Though as a matter of fact Callicles claims that this is the courageous *and intelligent* choice (492a2–3, etc.).

They just need to become better, i.e., wiser, people (though it will still be true that they should be stopped, or should stop themselves, from going for what they presently go for, in ignorance). And that, I wish to suggest, is what getting one's soul in order will be for Socrates.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> I do not imagine for a moment that the present paper, or indeed the group of papers to which it belongs, will convince those inclined to disbelieve my conclusions. The paper (and its sister-papers) will, however, suffice to indicate a line of approach to the *Gorgias*—and to other dialogues—that I myself presently find the most helpful in my attempt to understand the twists and turns of Plato's arguments.

## UNIFIED AGENCY AND *AKRASIA* IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*\*

CHRISTOPHER SHIELDS

Isn't there something ridiculous about the expression 'master of oneself' (*kreittô hautou*)? For surely the master would also be the slave and the slave the master; and the same thing will be designated in every case. (*Republic* 430e11–431a1)<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps a simple soul of the sort Plato postulates first in the *Phaedo* and then again in *Republic* X cannot engage in akratic conduct (*Phaedo* 80b10; cf. 78c1–4, 80b1–2). A simple soul might be thought somehow insufficiently complex in its psychic make-up to exhibit weakness of will: it assesses, values, prefers, and executes, all in a single seamless and steadfast progression. By contrast, a multi-parted soul, of the sort Plato introduces in *Republic* IV, may seem easily liable to akratic action. With every opportunity for internal discord and strife, for halting and hesitation, and for indecision about its all-things-considered best course of action, a complex soul is a committee unto itself, and may first determine what is best and then, at the moment of implementation, fall under the sway of some diverting impulse, its judgment perhaps occluded by one of its short-sighted parts, which care about local gratification and not at all about the long-term good of the whole. Still less do such inferior parts know or care about the Good, attention to which might direct the more elevated faculties to turn the attention of the whole not only to its own corporate well-being but to the effects of its action upon other souls as well.

Armed with this easy thought, it has proven irresistible to many to understand *Republic* IV as a rebuke to Socrates, who had denied the possibility of *akrasia* in the *Protagoras*. It has also at the same time seemed a repudiation of the psychology underlying Socrates' rejection of *akrasia*.<sup>2</sup>

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\* I thank Rachel Singpurwalla for her incisive comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Οὐκοῦν τὸ μὲν κρείττω αὐτοῦ γελοῖον; ὁ γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ κρείττων καὶ ἥττων δήπου ἂν αὐτοῦ εἶη καὶ ὁ ἥττων κρείττων· ὁ αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐν ᾗ πασιν τοῦτοις προσαγορεύεται.

<sup>2</sup> So Frede (1992), xxx: 'If we find this highly intellectualist account of the passions as judgments of some kind implausible, we should keep in mind that it is only

In its most extreme formulation, the picture of complexity of *Republic* IV has been thought a version of homuncularism, such that the three parts of the soul delineated there—the *logistikon*, the *epithumêtikon*, and the *thumoeides*—are virtual little men, tiny agents who squabble for control of the soul's directionality.<sup>3</sup> The one who dominates sets the character of the whole; and when no one of them dominates, there ensues the instability and waffling characteristic of the akratic.

I have elsewhere argued that the metaphysical psychology presupposed by this account is misguided, since we are constrained, contrary to initial appearances, to regard the soul of *Republic* IV as metaphysically simple.<sup>4</sup> Now I shall want to reject developmentalism for the moral

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Plato, in the *Republic* (437b ff.), who, precisely to explain how one can act against the judgment of one's reason, for the first time introduces different parts of the soul, each with its own desires, allowing us to understand how irrational desire may overcome the dictates of desire and reason. Here in the *Protagoras*, Socrates seems to argue as if the soul just were reason, and the passions were reasoned beliefs or judgments of some kind, and as if, therefore, we were entirely guided or motivated by beliefs of one kind or another. On this picture of the soul, it is easy to see why Socrates thinks that nobody acts against his knowledge or even his beliefs: nothing apart from beliefs could motivate such an action.' Irwin (1999), 287, reaches a similar conclusion, as does Miller (1999), 100, who concludes: 'Plato's early theory of the soul was substantially revised in order to explain conflicting motivations. Central to this revision were the conceptions of the soul as a self-moving principle and of desires as motions of the soul. The *Phaedo*'s doctrine of the simplicity of the soul on both counts had to yield to the tripartite psychology.' Also typical is Cooper (1984/2001), 91, who captures the common understanding well: 'That Plato in the *Republic* is self-consciously rejecting this Socratic theory is by now well accepted; and most philosophical readers no doubt agree that the *Republic*'s theory is a distinct improvement.'

<sup>3</sup> Annas (1981) made a strong case for homuncularism, to widespread agreement and approval. Similar observations are found in Burnyeat (1976) and Moline (1981, 1988). Bobonich (2001), 204–6, is slightly more circumspect: 'For better or worse, Plato's moral psychology in the *Republic* is committed to the idea that every person is a compound of agentlike parts.' In speaking of agentlike parts, Bobonich implicitly, and rightly, highlights a cause for concern relating to literal-minded versions of homuncularism. Irwin (1995), 219–22, relying especially on 588c7–d5, also accepts a muted version of homuncularism while calling attention to some inadequacies of any overly emphatic version of this view. Price (1995), 56–7 raises a series of intelligent worries about homuncularism, which he thinks Plato may be constrained to accept as a result of one application of his Principle of Non-Contrariety, the part-generating principle upon which Plato relies to effect psychic division. (See n. 17 below on Price's versions of his Principle of Non-Contrariety.)

<sup>4</sup> In Shields (2001), I argued that the supposed shift in Plato's metaphysical psychology from a simple to a complex or tri-partite soul is, despite the evidence of *Republic* IV, hard to credit. Already in *Republic* X (611b, 611e2) Plato reverts to a version of the soul directly akin to the position of the *Phaedo*, according to which the soul is essentially, and so necessarily, simple. In that connection, I argued that in fact the argument for a tri-partite of *Republic* IV cannot establish the existence of essentially distinct psychic parts, because it cannot establish that the soul's being divisible is *de re* necessary. I also

psychology as well. Specifically, I argue that Plato does and does not disagree with the Socrates of the *Protagoras*: while he accepts, as all must, that what I will call *implementation failure* is possible, Plato continues to maintain that narrow *akrasia*—the sort which earns Socrates’ ire—is impossible.<sup>5</sup> Still, the closest agent in the *Republic* to the highly unified Socratic agent of the *Protagoras* is the just person, the philosopher for whom narrow *akrasia* appears unthinkable. Thus, if there is a disagreement between Socrates and Plato, it is about the nature or scope of intentional agency and not about *akrasia*. Moreover, it is unnecessary and unhelpful to understand such soul-division as occurs in *Republic* IV on the model of homuncularism. It is unnecessary because we do not need homuncularism either to understand Plato’s moral psychology or to explain implementation failure; it is unhelpful because homuncularism both fails in its own terms to explain *akrasia* and obscures an instructive connection between agency and psychic unity which Plato is at pains to highlight in his *Republic*.

### 1. *Clarifying Questions about Akrasia*

Is *akrasia* impossible? Before we attempt an answer, we should acknowledge that ‘*akrasia*’ is a blurry term, modulating in its meaning from treatment to treatment.<sup>6</sup> That acknowledged, and once we have become

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claimed there, but did not argue, that it would thus be incorrect to regard a shift in Plato’s moral psychology as somehow consequential upon a more fundamental shift in his metaphysical psychology, at least up to the time of the *Republic*. While not assuming the argument of that paper, the present paper does form a natural complement to it, insofar as it finds more agreement than disagreement in Plato’s various excursions into moral psychology up to the time of the *Republic*. This is, of course, precisely as might be expected if indeed there is no underlying metaphysical shift licensing any new developments.

<sup>5</sup> He says only that ‘on the basis of what has been agreed, this [viz. moving towards what one dreads while it is open not to do so] is impossible’ (ἡ ἀδύνατον ἐκ τῶν ὁμολογημένων, 358e4). Note that the modality here is hypothetical, as it is at 359e2 and again at 360e4–5, where we find the same, perfectly appropriate circumspection. It is on the assumption of the moral psychology described that no-one could act so inexplicably.

<sup>6</sup> We should agree, in part, with Schiffer (1976), who asserts: “‘Weakness of will’ is an unfortunate if picturesque term of art and has never had better than a vacillating reference—one would be rash to try to provide for all its applications...’ We should agree with him, because we find some authors treating *akrasia* as a case of acting against an all-things-considered *belief* (doxastic *akrasia*); others as acting against *knowledge* (epistemic *akrasia*); others who speak not in terms of action but of choice or intention; and cutting across these differences, we find some who treat *akrasia* as peculiarly moral,

clear about our question, we may ask whether Socrates, as he is represented in Plato's *Protagoras*, believes that *akrasia* is impossible. Supposing that he does, we may press on, asking further whether in his *Republic* Plato challenges Socrates' point of view, by dividing the soul and thus validating the phenomenon by uncovering its proper aetiology.

Special care is required when addressing these latter questions, for the blurry term in question was not Plato's term at all: he does not use the word '*akrasia*' in his surviving dialogues.<sup>7</sup> He does not represent Socrates as explicitly denying the possibility of something called '*akrasia*'; and he does not present himself, in the *Republic*, as reinstating the possibility of the same by postulating a divided soul. It is rather Aristotle, whose terminology we have largely come to adopt, who represents Socrates in these terms:

It would be awful, Socrates thought, when knowledge is present in someone for something else to master it and drag it about as if it were a slave. Socrates campaigned against this account altogether, on the grounds that there is no *akrasia*: No-one acts against what he supposes to be best, but does so rather because of ignorance. (*EN* VII 3, 1145b23–27)<sup>8</sup>

Aristotle has Socrates denying *akrasia* and holding that all putative examples of such are more properly described as cases of cognitive failure.

It is probably best to suppose that what is at stake in Socrates' denial of *akrasia* is not (*pace* Aristotle, 1145b27–28) an attempt to deny a manifest phenomenon of our lived lives. Rather, he means to reject a positive *account* of how our experience is best to be conceptualized and

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peculiarly prudential, both, or neither. Still, we should agree with Schiffer only in part because there is nothing unfortunate about the term, or our questions, once we have become clear about what we intend to ask. Mele (2004) offers a lucid overview of some approaches to *akrasia*. For some of these distinctions as they apply to the Platonic context, see Carone (2001). My dominant conclusions in this paper are fully consistent with Carone's, though we arrive at our similar destinations by different routes.

<sup>7</sup> In the traditional Platonic corpus, the word shows up only twice, both times in the plainly spurious *Definitiones*, at 416a1 and 416a23. The first offers a definition of *akrasia* as a violent disposition against right reason directed towards pleasant-seeming things; the second occurs in definition of *prattle* (*lalia*), which is treated as an irrational weakness (*akrasia*) pertaining to speech. This may be compared with Aristotle, who uses the word 87 times, primarily in his ethical works but also scattered elsewhere through the corpus; it occurs another five times in the spurious or doubtful works in his corpus.

<sup>8</sup> Δεινὸν γὰρ ἐπιστήμης ἐνούσης, ὥς ᾤετο Σωκράτης, ἄλλο τι κρατεῖν καὶ περιέλκειν αὐτὴν ὥσπερ ἀνδράποδον. Σωκράτης μὲν γὰρ ὅλως ἐμάχετο πρὸς τὸν λόγον ὥς οὐκ οὐσης ἀκρασίας· οὐθένα γὰρ ὑπολαμβάνοντα πράττειν παρὰ τὸ βέλτιστον, ἀλλὰ δι' ἄγνοιαν.



explained. To become clear about the phenomenon we have in view, let us begin by recounting an apparently incontestable experiential datum: we sometimes resolve to pursue a course of action *a* in preference to *b*, because we suppose, or suppose that we suppose, that *a* is all-things-considered preferable to *b*, and yet then at the moment of action opt for *b*, only to indulge in post-act self-recrimination and regret, followed by internal regrouping and renewed resolve not to swerve away from the good we seek, or suppose that we seek, when it next presents itself to us. If some version of this experience resonates, then we may safely acknowledge a version of *implementation failure* as follows: an action *a* is an instance of *implementation failure* for some subject *S* just in case: (i) *S* avowedly and sincerely prefers in an all-things-considered way some action *b* to *a*, (ii) *S* supposes that both *a* and *b* are equally available alternative actions; and (iii) *S* intentionally performs *a* rather than *b*. As stated, implementation failure should not be objectionable even to Socrates, since he may acknowledge that people act this way, only to reject a putative and familiar explanation given in terms of pleasure-driven weakness of will. One might, after all, explain *S*'s avowedly and sincerely preferring *b* to *a* while doing *a* intentionally by observing that *S* is self-deceived, confused about her own motives, factually unilluminated, cognitively unstable at the moment of action, or otherwise simply fickle. If someone finds implementation failure puzzling, this may be due only to the fact that one or more of these simple explanations has been implicitly rejected with respect to a given case under scrutiny.

If that is so, then sharp and difficult puzzles about *akrasia* are best brought into proper relief only by placing restrictions on these alternative explanatory hypotheses, by stipulation or design, restrictions which effectively close down a range of initially plausible explanations for implementation failure. When we deny ourselves one or more of the pedestrian explanations of implementation failure, we generate genuine puzzles, but only if we maintain puzzling pairs of theses about agency.

For example, we run into difficulty if we find ourselves following Socrates, who in turns follows the many in the *Protagoras* by endeavoring to render our prospective accounts of implementation failure precise. To see why, let us assume that there exists a *highly unified intentional agent*, unified along two dimensions, internal and external.<sup>9</sup> Such an agent

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<sup>9</sup> The form of highly unified agency of the *Protagoras* is a form of egoistic hedonism.

would be unified *internally* by the postulation of a single hegemonic calculative faculty, reason, which is authoritative in the aetiology of action as a tribunal before which all deliberation must pass before action eventuates. Further, such an agent would be unified *externally* by the existence of but one seamless and known goal, for example pleasure, whose acquisition provides the sole focus of all deliberative consideration. Imagine such an agent to be a pleasure maximizer, god-like in knowledge and self-awareness, who always, in every case, seeks to maximize his pleasure yield; and suppose him faced with a choice between *a* and *b* such that he *knows* that *b* is the pleasure-maximizing alternative, let us say by a factor of ten to one, and he *knows* that he prefers pleasure to its absence or opposite because he *knows* himself to be a pleasure maximizer. Now imagine him, at the moment of action, consciously and in full possession of his wits, opting for *a* to the exclusion of *b*. There would be no contradiction in his so acting. Still, his acting would be puzzling, deeply puzzling—so puzzling that we might be inclined to say that it would be *impossible*, not logically impossible, as we have just seen, but *hypothetically* impossible, that is impossible on the hypotheses entered concerning his agency, epistemic status, and governing preference structures. One would be inclined to say either that he could not so act or that he had somewhere silently violated in his action the constraints on his agency and objectives that we have introduced.

Minimally, at any rate, it would be difficult to understand him as having made a motivated, intentional choice; surely, if acting as described, he would be acting on the basis of no pattern of reasoning consistent with his being the sort of agent acting in the sort of situation we have stipulated. Minimally, that is, we would put ourselves in the position of ascribing to such an agent a motiveless intentional action, something which, if we understand intentional actions to be a species of motivated actions, teeters on the inexplicable. We may call this kind of implementation failure *narrow akrasia*, because it structures its puzzle about *akrasia* by building into the action description a restrictive series of hypotheses about agency and environment. We may certainly ask how narrow *akrasia* could be deemed possible.<sup>10</sup> Note, however, that any such question

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The many evidently maintain that everyone, everywhere and always, pursues pleasure, and that all pleasure is commensurable. See Shields (2001).

<sup>10</sup> Mele (2004), 240, holds both that ‘it is a truism that a perfectly self-controlled agent would never act akratically’ and that ‘the occurrence of strict akratic actions

would prove to be a question not about implementation failure, but rather about how an agent answering to a specified set of requirements and operating with a determinately qualified and desired end in view might act contrary to her all-things-considered judgment.

We might, also, at the same time, ask a more general question, one not conditioned by such determinations and stipulations: given that implementation failure is plainly possible, what must we say about intentional agency in order to explain the ways within which such failure may be acceptably theorized? Further, if we discover that Socrates regards all agency as highly unified in the sense specified, how must Plato disagree with his picture of agency if he is to reject his view? We may then ask whether Plato in the *Republic* does disagree with him in this way.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. *Two Simplifying Assumptions about Socrates in the Protagoras*

Socrates in the *Protagoras* never claimed to detect a contradiction or metaphysical impossibility in the case of implementation failure. What he does say plainly is this: ‘Those things which one regards as bad, one neither goes toward nor accepts willingly’<sup>12</sup> (358e5–6). Without being subjected to interpretation and precisification, so much does not commit Socrates to the impossibility of even narrow *akrasia*; still less does it implicate him in any rejection of implementation failure. In the first instance, without a full specification of what a *willing* agent is supposed to be, we have no reason to suppose that the agents in question are

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seems to be an unfortunate fact of life.’ In introducing *narrow akrasia*, I do not intend to make it analytic, or a truism, that *akrasia* so conceived is impossible, only that it would be puzzling, and that we would reasonably demand an explanation of how it could occur if someone insisted that it does occur.

<sup>11</sup> For ease of reference, I will call the Socrates of the *Protagoras* ‘Socrates’ and the Socrates of the *Republic* ‘Plato’. This is because I suppose the Socrates of the *Protagoras* to represent the views of the historical Socrates and the Socrates of the *Republic* the views of the historical Plato. In the present context, though, this is mainly for ease of reference; certainly nothing in the discussions of the respective moral psychologies will hinge on this practice. If someone objects, perhaps because she believes that I am wrong about these historical ascriptions, then the proper names may be regarded as disguised definite descriptions, ‘Socrates’ meaning roughly ‘the Socrates who argues from the premisses of the many in the *Protagoras* that no one willingly does what is bad,’ and ‘Plato’ meaning roughly ‘the Socrates of *Republic* IV who seems to many to doubt the cogency of this claim.’

<sup>12</sup> Ἄ δὲ ἡγεῖται κακά, οὐδὲνα οὔτε ἰέναι ἐπὶ ταῦτα οὔτε λαμβάνειν ἐκόντα.

highly unified. Moreover, it is not clear even what kind of implementation failure Socrates has in view. Unless we are prepared to place tight restrictions on how an action qualifies as willing, whether for example *S*'s being willing is consistent with moderate instability of agency or with some amount of culpable ignorance on *S*'s part, then one can be guilty of implementation failure while acting willingly. The point is not that we must or even should understand willing agency along these lines, but that until we unpack Socrates' conception of the willing, we have no grounds for regarding him as making any kind of paradoxical claim about *akrasia*, of any form.

In fact, we should have a worry about how Socrates in the *Protagoras* conceives the willing agent. What is clear is only that he mines the views of the many in order to structure a moral psychology against whose backdrop concerns about willing the bad are reasonably motivated (*Prot.* 352b–e). The many are hedonists; and they are also evidently committed egoists. There is, then, a *bona fide* question as to whether we should understand Socrates to be speaking in *propria persona* when he adopts these views. This would involve him in maintaining both a comprehensive form of hedonism and an austere commitment to psychological egoism, commitments we do not always find him making elsewhere. Our first simplifying assumption is that Socrates in the *Protagoras* is indeed speaking in *propria persona* and that the views he offers on behalf of the many are in fact views he shares in common with them, even if his versions of them are somewhat regimented.<sup>13</sup>

This simplifying assumption begets another, one crucial to our understanding of Socrates' concern. This is that his complaints about the possibility of willingly doing what the agent regards as bad are structured only *relative* to a moral psychology of a highly determinate sort. For he portrays the many as presupposing a form of agency akin to the *highly unified agency* introduced; the many are forced to swallow the consequence that any willing choice of what is bad is unintelligible only relative to the backdrop of an austere form of hedonistic egoism (*Prot.* 358e4–5, 359e2, 360e4–5). They are committed, of course, only

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, if we adhere to Fitzgerald's canon, we should accept as some evidence for this view Aristotle's manner of referring to Socrates in the three instances of 'Socrates' in *EN* VII 3 (1145b23, 27, 1147b15). According to the pattern of the canon, Aristotle is referring not to the character in the *Protagoras* but rather to the historical figure of Socrates himself. If that is his intention, and if he is right about Socrates, then also we have some reason for supposing that the Socrates of the *Protagoras* is speaking in *propria persona*, on behalf of the historical figure.

unwittingly to this consequence. What they want to maintain is that knowledge can fail to be hegemonic, because it can be dislodged by other, non-cognitive states, say pleasure or any number of affective or emotional states (352c–d). Socrates objects to this, and thus rejects their proposed explanation of implementation failure. If this is correct, then he is concerned not with implementation failure as such. Rather, he is concerned to reject an appeal to their blithe endorsement of narrow *akrasia*, which is given in terms of the power of pleasure to rule reason. This Socrates does find objectionable—but, again, only relative to the hypothesized moral psychology of highly unified agency. This, then, is the second simplifying assumption: Socrates rejects not the possibility of implementation failure but rather the cogency of one proposed explanation of this phenomenon. He objects to the possibility on narrow *akrasia*, something the many seem unreflectively content to endorse.

This is significant insofar as there seems nothing especially paradoxical or even puzzling about his posture. On the contrary, it seems perfectly reasonable for Socrates to raise doubts about the intelligibility of narrow *akrasia*. Some content can be given to this judgment by reflecting on the sort of argument Socrates deploys, which argument will in turn provide a touchstone for understanding the approach to *akrasia* and agency in Plato's *Republic*. Although he adopts several local arguments, some evidently involving possibly illicit substitution failures,<sup>14</sup> his general thought seems to be this, an argument *Against Narrow Akrasia* (ANS):

- (1) Suppose that *S* is a highly unified agent, externally and internally.
- (2) If *S* is highly unified externally, then *S* has in view a single end, e.g. pleasure, which is seamless and everywhere commensurable.
- (3) If *S* is highly unified internally, then *S* makes complete all-things-considered judgments with respect to every intentional action *a* by means of a single, authoritative faculty.
- (4) If (1), (2), and (3), then whenever *b* is all-things-considered preferable to *a*, then if *S* willingly pursues *a* over *b* while knowing *b* to be a viable option, *S* has made a cognitive mistake.
- (5) If *S* has made a cognitive mistake when acting, *S* is inappropriately described as having her knowledge overcome by pleasure or some emotional or affective state.

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<sup>14</sup> Taylor (1975), 180–181, provides some reason for thinking that one way of taking the argument of 355c1–8 implicates Socrates in an illicit substitution of co-referential terms into an opaque context.

(6) Hence, if *S* is a highly unified agent, then whenever *b* is all-things-considered preferable to *a*, and *S* willingly pursues *a* over *b* while knowing *b* to be a viable option, then *S* is inappropriately described as having her knowledge overcome by pleasure or some emotional or affective state.

(ANS-6) presents Socrates' rejection of the explanation of implementation failure preferred by the many when they contend: 'though knowledge is often present in a man, it does not rule over him, but rather something else does, sometimes desire, sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, other times love, often fear'<sup>15</sup> (352b5–8).

Of course, one may want to query (ANS-4) or (ANS-5). Relevant to the issue at hand, though, we may observe that given that the dominant argument of the *Protagoras* yields only (ANS-6), there is no reason to suppose that Socrates has any larger target in mind. Accordingly, if he stops short of rejecting the intelligibility of implementation failure, then there is nothing especially paradoxical about Socrates' contention with respect to the views of the many. While he is indeed at variance with some commonplace and easy explanations of implementation failure, Socrates is not therefore committed to any thesis which ought to cause incredulity in his modern readers. On the contrary, he is right that narrow *akrasia* is a peculiar and unmotivated, or even impossible, explanation of implementation failure. Moreover, and in any event, he is right to suggest that there is something puzzling about implementation failure against the backdrop of highly unified agency.

Assuming this much background regarding the *Protagoras*, it becomes possible to forge a deeper appreciation of Plato's conception of the relation between *akrasia* and agency in the *Republic*.

### 3. *Being Caught Unawares in Republic IV and Beyond*

Let no-one, cautions Plato, unsettle us when we are unwary, by claiming that nobody desires drink, but rather good drink, nor food, but rather good food, on the grounds that after all everyone desires good things. (438a1–3)<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ἄλλ' ἀνούσης πολλάκις ἀνθρώπων ἐπιστήμης οὐ τὴν ἐπιστήμην αὐτοῦ ἄρχειν ἄλλ' ἄλλο τι, τοτὲ μὲν θυμόν, τοτὲ δὲ ἡδονήν, τοτὲ δὲ λύπην, ἐνίοτε δὲ ἔρωτα, πολλάκις δὲ φόβον.

<sup>16</sup> Μήτοι τις, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἀσκέπτους ἡμᾶς ὄντας θορυβήσῃ, ὥς οὐδεὶς ποτοῦ ἐπιθυμεῖ ἀλλὰ χρηστοῦ ποτοῦ, καὶ οὐ σίτου ἀλλὰ χρηστοῦ σίτου. πάντες γὰρ ἄρα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν.

About whose counter-contention should we be worried in this regard? Plausibly, it would derive from someone who does not accept the principle we have recently invoked in our bid to establish psychic partitioning (436b7–c1), perhaps someone who denies that the soul has discrete parts with autonomous motivational pathways, and who wishes to show that however disparate our sundry motives for acting may be, ultimately everything involved in the aetiology of an intentional action perforce filters through a unified and authoritative adjudicator focused exclusively on our individual good. Such a person might observe that since no-one desires bad things for himself, any impulse to perform an act which is in fact harmful will naturally wilt before the knowledge that performing it will prove, in fact, all things considered, deleterious. Someone with this sort of moral psychology would indeed find our psychic fission disturbing, precisely insofar as it relies upon a principle designed to generate discrete parts corresponding to internal conflicts keyed to distinct and often non-overlapping goods, such as pleasure and health.

According to the part-generating principle of *Republic* IV (436b7–c1; cf. 602e4–603a2, 603d1–2), whenever we find ourselves tugged in opposite directions with reference to the same object, as when we both desire to eat a *croissant aux amandes*, because we know it will taste buttery lovely, and yet feel repelled by that very prospect, because we are recovering from heart surgery, our internal struggle can only be explained by a division of the soul into discrete parts capable of being pitted against one another.<sup>17</sup> The theory of *Republic* IV thus models the datum of internal psychic discord by first postulating two discrete motivational seats, the *epithumêtikon*, the well of our appetite, and the *logistikón*, the faculty whose focus on our long term well-being intervenes to censor our desire.

Such a theory might well be assailed by someone who prefers a model of action given in terms of a single faculty serving as the ultimate court of motivational appeal. If this is the objector's point of view, then perhaps the opponent may be someone close: the Socrates of

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<sup>17</sup> Price (1995), 40–56, considers the strengths and defects of a variety of formulations of Plato's part-generating principle, helpfully distinguishing between weak and strong contrariety, marking both: (i) degrees of phenomenological access to desires; and (ii) degrees of active intentional commitment to the pursuit of an intended outcome. While a subject may comfortably desire, weakly, both the fish and fowl on a restaurant's menu, a strong conflict arises in her if she moves to order them both when only one is available to her. Other useful discussions include Stalley (1975), Moline (1978, 1981), and especially Woods (1987).

*Republic* IV is standing on guard against the Socrates of the *Protagoras*, who had insisted in uncompromising terms upon the incompatibility of narrow *akrasia* and a moral psychology committed to highly unified agency. Someone committed to such unremitting unity of agency might well offer the sort of objection against which the Socrates of *Republic* IV cautions. After all, it would be natural and appropriate for someone committed to so highly unified a conception of agency to counter the postulation of soul parts driven by internal discord by insisting that there are no purely good-indifferent wells of motivation: we are all oriented towards pleasure alone and we must funnel our desires through an ultimate faculty dedicated to determining the best route to maximization.

Accordingly, the suggestion thus lies near that the Socrates of *Republic* IV has in view the Socrates of the *Protagoras*.<sup>18</sup> If we were to suppose that each is a spokesman for a different period in the development of Plato's moral psychology, it would follow that Plato is cautioning his readers against a mistake he had himself earlier committed, viz. the denial of *akrasia*. This easy and natural thought is, I shall argue, in one way apt and in another way deeply misleading.

It is plausible if we regard Socrates as committed to the picture of highly unified agency shown to be (at least *prima facie*) incompatible with narrow *akrasia*. Even then, however, we would have a straightforward incompatibility only if Plato himself rejected highly unified agency *tout court*. Here, however, the story is mixed. On the one hand, the soul-division of *Republic* IV, while not in fact generating essentially distinct parts,<sup>19</sup> at least allows for the existence of distinct and differently focused sources of motivation. To that extent, then, we have a partial rejection of the conception of highly unified agency undergirding Socrates' rejection of narrow *akrasia* as an explanation of implementation failure. Still,

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<sup>18</sup> Irwin (1995), 206, reasonably suggests that the Socrates of the *Protagoras* is at least a *prima facie* target of our concern: 'This passage confronts an apparently Socratic thesis. For Plato tells us that we should not be put off if someone tells us that our appetite is not just for drink, but for good drink, on the ground that all of us have appetites for goods (438a1–5), since appetites are desires and all desires are for the good. This thesis that we should not be 'put off' by seems to be the thesis of Socrates in the early dialogues.' Still, he initially cautions: 'Whether it really is the Socratic thesis and whether Plato really rejects it must be considered after we have seen how Plato treats it.' Penner (1971), 96, is less cautious: '(...) the parts-of-the-soul doctrine is intended as a refutation of Socrates' view of *akrasia* (...) The premises 'All thirst is for drink and not for good drink or F-drink or etc.' is directed (all but explicitly) against Socrates.'

<sup>19</sup> See Shields (2001), 149–151.



if the souls of *Republic* IV are not essentially partite, then it remains possible for Plato to maintain that at least some souls may be highly unified, namely those not fractured by internal discord and disunity. Further, if the *Republic* entertains the possibility of highly unified souls, then these souls will be no less susceptible to narrow *akrasia* than were the highly unified souls of the *Protagoras*. Consequently, on the assumption that there are such souls, any linear opposition between the *Republic* IV and the *Protagoras* will be highly distorting.

It is for this reason all the more important to appreciate that the *Republic* recognizes such souls: the just have perfectly harmonious souls which evince a high degree of agentive unity:

One who is just does not allow each bit within him to do the work of any other or allow the classes within him to interfere with one another. He structures well what is really his own and rules over himself. He puts himself in good order, is his own friend and comes to be dear to himself, joining in unity what are three, like three limiting notes in a simple musical scale—high, low, and middle. Having bound together all these and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things, he becomes entirely one, moderate and well assembled. Only then does he act. (443d1–e2)<sup>20</sup>

The just person ‘joins’ or perhaps ‘fits’ what were previously three into one, binding them together in such a way that, from having been many, he becomes *entirely one* (*pantapasin hena*, 443e1).

Two features of Plato’s diction are striking. First, in saying that the just person ‘joins in unity’ (*sunarmosanta*, 443d5, cf. 443e2) and ‘binds together’ or perhaps ‘forms into a union’ (*sundēsanta*, 443e1; cf. *Laws* 875a6–7) the faculties of his soul, Plato does not mean that he structures them, as the musical metaphor might seem to suggest, so that they vibrate together so as to produce a pleasing result. Rather, his diction implies something closer to the activity of a carpenter or joiner, who fits pieces together so that they are smoothly dovetailed and seamlessly fused, thus forming a fully unified entity and not merely an aggregate or composite. So much is continuous with the second striking feature of his

<sup>20</sup> Ἀληθῶς περὶ ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ, μὴ ἐάσαντα τὰλλότρια πράττειν ἕκαστον ἐν αὐτῷ μηδὲ πολυπραγμονεῖν πρὸς ἀλλήλα τὰ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γένη, ἀλλὰ τῷ ὄντι τὰ οἰκεῖα εὖ θέμενον καὶ ἄρξαντα αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ κοσμήσαντα καὶ φίλον γενόμενον ἑαυτῷ καὶ συναρμόσαντα τρία ὄντα, ὥσπερ ὄρους τρεῖς ἀρμονίας ἀτεχνῶς, νεάτης τε καὶ ὑπάτης καὶ μέσης, καὶ εἰ ἄλλα ἅττα μεταξὺ τυγχάνει ὄντα, πάντα ταῦτα συνδήσαντα καὶ παντάπασιν ἓνα γενόμενον ἐκ πολλῶν, σῶφρονα καὶ ἡρμοσμένον, οὕτω δὴ πράττειν ἥδη.

diction, the claim that the just person ‘from having been many things becomes entirely one’ (*pantapasin hena genomenon ek pollôn*, 443e1). Here the suggestion may seem to involve a kind of self-synthesis, a process of becoming just by many discrete things somehow making themselves into one, as if by some form of psychic coagulation.

Probably, though, Plato has in mind something more readily explicable, the subordination of some semi-autonomous components by a dominant one: yielding a form of unity so complete that the formerly disparate bits surrender their identity to the whole. The picture is not dissimilar to a musical chord, but is nonetheless closer to a situation in which distinct small streams flow in a similar direction only eventually to become unified into one larger stream. If due to erosion patterns several small tributaries fold together into a single river, then the resulting river does not contain the older tributaries as sub-streams; they are now, rather, a single flowing stream (cf. 429d–430a). If this is the sort of picture Plato has in view for the motivational streams of the just person, then he supposes that making many things one involves, at a minimum, the complete subordination to the *logistikon* of some less than fully rational motivational seats within the soul.

When thinking of the relation between the faculties of the just person’s soul, one central form of unity Plato seems to envisage, certainly not the only possible form, is *functional unity*. According to this approach, the ends and activities of the *epithumêtikon* and the *thumoeides* are, in a fully integrated soul, completely overtaken by the ends and activities of the *logistikon*. Indeed, the *logistikon* of the just person comprehends not only these familiar parts, Plato rather intriguingly says, but also ‘any others there may be in between’ (*ei alla atta metaxu tunchanei onta*, 443d7). All facets of the soul, then, are brought into line with the *logistikon*. Of course, this form of unity would also cohere immediately with the definition of justice in the individual soul offered in *Republic* IV, that each part does its own without interfering with the proper functioning of any other part (441d12–e2, cf. 353d9), where it is implied that this would also involve the non-rational parts willingly subordinating themselves to the dictates of the hegemonic rational faculty (441d12–442b4, 443c9–443a3, 554c–d). If that is correct, then one may think of the moral psychology of *Republic* IV as involving a sliding scale of unity, with the just person being completely one and other non-virtuous agents as being diminishingly so, until such time as they are so fragmented and fractured that they fail to meet any reasonable standard of agency at all.

What emerges from this account, then, is not that soul-division makes *akrasia* possible, but that Plato, no less than Socrates, sees no room for narrow *akrasia* in the face of highly unified intentional agency. This further suggests that implementation failure is to be explained not by any failure of will, or any unmotivated neglect of settled preference determination, but rather by a bare lack of unified agency.

Indeed, Plato's treatment of the deviant souls in *Republic* VIII and IX presents them all, in one way or another, as falling away from an ideal of internal or external unity, or both. For example, at a reasonably high end of the scale of unity is the deviant soul of the money-lover, corresponding to the oligarchic constitution. Though capable of disciplined action, the money-loving soul is made so only via the forced subordination of one form of desire to another. The disciplined money-maker, Plato contends, would 'not be entirely free from civil war and would not be one but rather someone duplex' with the further result that 'the true virtue belonging to the single-minded and harmonious soul would elude him by a considerable measure' (554d9–10, e4–5). In subordinating one part of his soul to another, he will be subject to internal strife and discord; but when the higher desire is subordinated to the baser, he is nonetheless capable of action disciplined in thrift and of a sort which, relative to his money-making end, is predictably successful. He is not akratic, and he tends not to suffer from implementation failure. Rather, he acts as an unstably unified agent, one whose money-making objectives provide an end which is locally unified but at variance with his long-term good. Such a figure provides a portrait of reasonably high internal unity, but is nonetheless far from virtue since the money-maker can and will have periods of internal psychic chafing and abrasive upheaval.

Much lower down on the scale of unity is the soul of the democratic man: 'he is a manifold and full of all manner of temperaments, both fine and many-colored; and as the democratic city is, so too the man' (561e3–5). The democratic soul, however, utterly lacks directionality, succumbing to every passing fancy and failing to make even rudimentary discriminations between better and worse pursuits (561c6–d7).

In characterizing agency in these terms, Plato allows for degrees of agentive unity, governed in part by the unity and suitability of the end pursued. This scale sets a contrast between two extremes: heading towards one extreme we find the abysmally fickle directionality of the democratic soul, which trades end for end as whimsy dictates,

contrasting at the upper limit with the tranquil stability of the just person, who regards as worthy of pursuit only those actions which secure psychic harmony (443c9–444a2, 590c8–592b6). At the top end of the spectrum, the just person is such that his ‘entire soul follows the philosophical <part>, there being no civil war in it,’ since each part does its own assigned task, and enjoys its own pleasure, which is the best and truest pleasure possible for it (586e4–587a1). Here again, the lack of civil war in the city models the lack of psychic discord in the harmonious and unified soul. Unified agency begets unified action, unruffled by competing claims generated by variegated ends or uncoordinated and undisciplined desire.

Taking all this together, we find in Plato a plausible reason for cautioning against those who would deny psychic division on the grounds that everyone everywhere desires the good, so that no-one ever desires drink as such, but rather only good drink. This is false. Some people do have good-independent sources of motivation capable of gaining the upper hand in the antecedents of their actions. Importantly, however, this does not open up the possibility of narrow *akrasia* in the *Republic*. On the contrary, the implementation failure envisaged by Plato in *Republic* IV continues to presuppose the hypothetical impossibility of narrow *akrasia*, the knowing performing of what is rightly understood to be sub-optimal by a highly unified agent. For the closest model for such an agent in the *Republic* is the just person, someone whose justice simply consists in an extreme form of reason-governed psychic unity. Narrowly akratic action is at variance with Plato’s moral psychology of justice.

One may further wish to argue that *Republic* IV nonetheless paves the way for a defensible explanation of implementation failure, one at variance with the moral psychology championed in the *Protagoras*. This matter would be difficult to decide, since Socrates does not speak to the general question of implementation failure in that work. In this sense, though, the *Republic* does represent a kind of departure for Plato; for in it he is keen to explore a wide variety of forms of implementation failure, because he wishes to show why a sensible person would rightly wish to avoid them all.

#### 4. *Agency, Akrasia, and Homunculi*

Part of the importance of understanding Plato's attitude towards unified agency and *akrasia* in the *Republic* resides in the instructive connection he forges between disunity and implementation failure. Because there is a tendency first to regard the introduction of soul-parts in the *Republic* as necessary and sufficient for the possibility of *akrasia*,<sup>21</sup> and because in one extreme form soul partitioning is modeled on the presence in each soul of autonomous or quasi-autonomous *homunculi*, it bears reflecting upon how well these contentions capture Plato's approach to agency and *akrasia*.

They do not; and how they do not helps bring into focus an essential component of Plato's approach to implementation failure.

We may come to appreciate his approach if we begin by reconsidering two poles along a continuum of agency recognized by Plato. At one end is group discord, which, at least initially, is none too difficult to comprehend. At the other end is the highly unified agent, like the just person, someone god-like in knowledge and flawless in motivational psychology, knowing and seeking an identified good with an unblemished and serene understanding of self and the self's well-being. In contrast to the tumult of the group, discord internal to such an agent would be peculiar indeed. Moreover, as we have seen, narrowly akratic action would be inexplicable, because permanently unmotivated, or indeed unfathomable, since it will be—in some appropriate modality—impossible for such a creature.

Beginning with the extreme of disarray, groups, whose co-ordinated activities are not readily explicable in terms of even minimal agency, we have no difficulty understanding internal discord. Different individuals competing for limited resources or finding themselves constrained to take up a common course of action will differ in their beliefs, desires, and preferences. All too frequently, some will want to dominate the others, and towards this end will deploy deceitful and dishonest rhetoric, eventually displaying naked power where necessary. Even in co-operative circumstances, distinct and incompatible conceptions of the common good will emerge, so that some decision procedure, implicit or explicit,

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<sup>21</sup> Although he thinks that Plato does accept a form of soul division intended to explain *akrasia* in the *Republic*, Bobonich (2001) rightly doubts that such a division is necessary for explaining akratic behavior.

will need to be introduced. Familiarly, decision procedures will be shaped and colored by the dominant personality traits of the individuals in the group. One is meek and the other is querulous; one leads aggressively while another follows without complaint; perhaps some others, though they can expect to be affected by the outcome, are mainly indifferent and will be content however things may go.

Common to co-operative and non-co-operative group dynamics alike is something so fundamental that it barely merits mention: groups are aggregates of discrete and individual agents, each with a unified field of consciousness, and each presented as a single player in a joint venture. Rightly assumed in the modeling of such exchanges is what we may call *minimal agency* on the part of their individual members. A minimal agent, let us stipulate, is an intentional actor, capable of engaging in conscious goal-directed activity. We expect a minimal agent to act, at least some of the time, on the basis of an autonomous set of preferences, and with an independence of will. Notably, every minimal agent arrives at a moment of decision with a peculiar and subjective history, one not shared with any other participant in a group decision, and fully outfitted with a unique affective life and a distinct doxastic set. Put in these terms, group discord is easy to understand because each member of the group is a distinct minimal agent and self-contained center of self. As such, it makes perfect sense to think about the ways members of the group do and do not co-ordinate their behaviors when interacting. Still, the group itself is not a minimal agent;<sup>22</sup> and this is why we would be hard pressed to speak of a group as intrinsically and non-derivatively akratic in its own right. The ease we find in modeling group discord stems in part from this very lack of minimal agency on the part of the group considered as a whole.

By contrast, we should struggle, as Plato seems to struggle, when we turn to the possibility of discord approaching the opposite end of a continuum of unified agency. As we have seen, when confronted with a highly unified agent, in both the internal and external senses specified, it becomes puzzling how internal discord should be possible, let alone actual. We do speak of internal struggles, as in some instances giving way to self-mastery. Yet we should be wary, as Plato is wary, of simple analyses of weakness given in terms of self-mastery. He finds the

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<sup>22</sup> After raising some reasonable objections to this possibility, Pettit (2001) attempts, unsuccessfully but instructively, to forge an approach to group *akrasia*.

picture of self-mastery not a little bewildering, because he finds the literal thought that one and the same subject be both master and mastered somehow amiss, as if one number could be greater than itself (*Rep.* 430e7–8, 11–12, 439c7, 430e11–431d3, 442b5–d1, 589a6–b6; cf. *Prot.* 358c3; *Laws* 627a2–c1, 645b2). Although he is prepared to proceed in a comfortable manner to gloss the notion of self-mastery in terms of the *control* (*enkrates*, 431a6) of a lower part by a higher, Plato nonetheless alerts us to something amiss in the original mode of speaking. In his gloss on the puzzle of self-mastery, Plato says:

It seems to me that this expression intends to say that there is something better and something worse in the very same man, with regard to his soul, and that whenever the better is in control of the worse, then a man is said to be ‘master of himself’, and for this there is praise. (*Rep.* 431a3–7)<sup>23</sup>

From this perspective, none of the peculiarities which give rise to Plato’s initial unease come into view; but then neither does anything approaching literal talk of self-mastery. A master of oneself is not a master of a slave who is also a slave of a master, but a temperate person, someone whose baser impulses bid but do not overwhelm.

If we focus instead on the original source of his lack of ease, we can appreciate why he might have difficulty with undeflated talk of self-mastery. There is no difficulty in thinking of one part, or one person, as coming to master or control another; but there is some peculiarity in thinking of one agent as being, properly speaking, the master of that same agent. Taking this thought one stage further, we might come to share Plato’s puzzlement by coming to see that that ‘self’ in ‘master’ and ‘slave’ can hardly be co-referential, so that if the self is the master, then what is mastered cannot be the self. Indeed, self-mastery makes sense only if self-enslavement is explicable; and though we are prepared to join Plato in speaking of one part of the soul enslaving another, it is altogether unclear what it would mean for the whole self to enslave itself, the whole self. Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that commentators have found congenial a conception of Platonic agency according to which the parts of the soul are effectively little men, *homunculi*, small autonomous or quasi-autonomous persons who find themselves co-habiting one and the same soul.

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<sup>23</sup> Φαίνεται μοι βούλεσθαι λέγειν οὗτος ὁ λόγος ὥς τι ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τὸ μὲν βέλτιον ἐνι, τὸ δὲ χεῖρον, καὶ ὅταν μὲν τὸ βέλτιον φύσει τοῦ χείρονος ἐγκρατὲς ᾖ, τοῦτο λέγειν τὸ κρεῖττω αὐτοῦ—ἐπαινεῖ γοῦν.

This is unfortunate, even though there is some initially persuasive reason to think of the delineated parts of the soul as *homunculi*.<sup>24</sup> Still, this reason should be resisted, since the theory is fraught with difficulties and explanatory inadequacies.

On the positive side, scholars find the following evidence for a homuncular theory in the *Republic*: (i) each part of the soul has pleasures and desires peculiar to it (580d3–587e4); (ii) each part has its own wants and wishes (437b1–c10, 439a1–d2); (iii) parts discourse with one another, each cajoling and persuading the others of the superiority of its point of view (442b5–d1, 554c11–e5, 589a6–b6); and (iv) each part can reason, or at least engage in rudimentary cognitive activities (442b5–d1, 574d12–575a7). So, to the extent that this data is compelling, we should come to regard the parts not merely as autonomous motivational sources, but as agent-like, or indeed as discrete minimal agents, each tending in its own direction until subdued by some other, superior part.

Still, even if we find this data compelling—and I will shortly question whether we have reason to do so—we should not therefore conclude that the introduction of *homunculi* somehow represents Plato's way to find a moral psychology adequate to the task of explaining *akrasia*. For in the first instance, *homunculi* are not adequate to this task. Three features of the homuncular view show it to be strikingly inadequate, both as an interpretation of Plato and on its own terms.

First, a *homunculus*, taken at face value, is an individual agent. If that is so, then an appeal to competing *homunculi* within the soul proves to be an affirmation rather than a denial of the Socratic picture. Socrates contended only that no highly unified agent could be narrowly *akratic*; he never suggested that groups of individuals could enter into discord such that they would fail to maximize their corporate interest. The picture of the soul as an aggregate of *homunculi* is a picture of a group, not that of a minimal agent, an intentional actor capable of engaging in conscious goal-directed activity. If in order to refute Socrates we must appeal to groups of individuals, then we have in effect conceded his dominant point. More to the point, if we suppose that we *need* to appeal to discrete agents in order to refute Socrates, then we have failed

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<sup>24</sup> This data is succinctly reviewed by Bobonich (2001), 204. Although he is sympathetic to a homuncular interpretation of *Republic* IV, Bobonich rightly wonders about both its strength and its ultimate explanatory efficacy. See nn. 3 and 18 above.



before we can begin. For in that case, we have implicitly conceded, evidently unreflectively, his key contention, namely that it makes no ready sense to imagine a highly unified agent capable of engaging in narrowly akratic behavior. This was precisely the purpose and force of his regimenting the views of the many under the banner of a rather austere form of hedonistic psychological egoism. If they had not agreed to the ruthless subordination of all motives to a single end subject to strict rational scrutiny, then the many would not have gotten themselves into their conundrum.

Second, the homuncular strategy seems misguided even in its own terms. Groups, however self-undermining they can be in their joint pursuits, are not normally thought of as akratic.<sup>25</sup> We should indeed be very hard-pressed to treat *any* group of discrete minimal agents as akratic, however that is to be conceived. In general, if *S* is akratic, then *S* crosses some threshold of intentionality, such that *S* has *inter alia* an intentional state carrying the content that *x* is all things considered preferable to *y*. A group is akratic, then, only if it is capable of manifesting, in a literal and non-derivative sense, such an intentional state. While there are models of group preferences and group desires, these are mainly and most readily given in terms of cumulative or aggregative individual desires. Such approaches fall well short of meeting the demand of a threshold of intentionality. This, of course, is precisely why we find group disagreement so much easier to understand than genuine *akrasia*. In this sense, our reluctance to ascribe *akrasia* to groups is grounded in an earlier reluctance to regard groups as exhibiting genuine intentionality.

Third, an appeal to *homunculi* is in any case at best a postponement strategy. Suppose we say that each part of the soul is an autonomous *homunculus*. Then we may ask: is or is not each *homunculus* a highly unified agent? If not, then presumably this will be explained by *its* having a group of *homunculi* living in still closer proximity. The analysis of its akratic conduct, having been given in terms of its querulous *homunculi*, will direct us to ask the question of unity pertaining to its component *homunculi*, and so on *ad infinitum*, or until we reach either a highly unified agent or a part whose status as a quasi-agent requires a non-homuncular explanation, in which case we might well not have begun careening

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<sup>25</sup> See, however, Pettit (2001), together with n. 22 above.

down this path in the first instance.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, we may identify highly unified agency in the members of our first group of *homunculi*, and argue that somehow, contrary to what has been urged, group non-co-ordination lends itself to characterization given in terms of *akrasia*. In that case, again, we must ask whether the individual *homunculi* may be individually akratic. If not, then again we have a vindication of Socrates, rather than a response to him. If, by contrast, we think we have a response to Socrates to the effect that highly unified agents can after all be akratic, then we have, or believe we have, a refutation of Socrates, one—crucially—capable of proceeding without recourse to *homunculi*. In that case, evidently, our initial postulation of *homunculi* was otiose. Once again, the key Socratic question pertained to whether a highly unified agent can be akratic. In the face of that question, the homuncular theorist simply stalls for time.

Taking all that together, we should not be sanguine about supposing that an appeal to a homuncular view of soul should somehow help us to model narrow *akrasia* in particular or implementation failure in general. This result in turn commends a reconsideration of the easy conclusion that, rightly or wrongly, Plato was moved to argue in some such way. Hence, to the extent that they are well motivated, these concerns about homuncularism recommend further reflection on two issues: (i) the thesis that soul-division is best understood on the homuncular theory; and (ii) the suggestion that Plato understood some version of homuncularism to play a special role in rendering *akrasia* intelligible.

As for (ii), where there is relevant data, it tells mainly in the opposite direction. In fact, and in any case, Plato's dominant use of soul-division in the *Republic* is directed neither towards an explanation of *akrasia* nor even towards the bare fact of implementation failure in general, but is deployed rather in service of a normative assessment of the suboptimal life paths taken by the unjust. This comes into clarity in a number of ways, but most directly in his extended comparison between the deviant

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<sup>26</sup> Aware of this sort of concern, Annas (1981), 144, suggests a top-down way of approaching psychological explanation: 'If one is applying the "top-down" strategy, there is no need for the explanatory items to be things like neurons which belong to a difference science. And so there is nothing wrong with talking of the explanatory parts of a whole person as though they were themselves people of a very simple kind. Talking of them as homunculi is very natural and unavoidable.' Although in psychological explanation one might well favor a top-down approach of one form or another, and though plainly many do find talk of homunculi perfectly natural in this context, such talk is neither unavoidable, or, as I urge in the text, unobjectionable.

constitutions and their corresponding souls in *Republic* VIII and IX. Thus, when completing one phase of his discussion of the just city and the just soul, Plato is reminded by Glaucon of an earlier commitment to discuss unjust cities and souls (543c5; cf. 449a–b). Glaucon reminds him that they had agreed to chart the faults of four kinds of deviant constitutions, together with the corresponding faults belonging to their correlative psychic types, ‘so that having seen them all and having agreed about which man was best and which worst, we might inquire whether the best was happiest and the worst most miserable, or otherwise’ (544a5–9). In the ensuing discussion, Plato considers at length the ways in which the lives of the unjust are inferior to those of the just, where these ways include, but are not limited to, the frustrations borne of their individual patterns of implementation failure. To take only one example, the worst, ‘the tyrannical soul—I am speaking of the whole soul—will least of all do what it wishes, and being forever dragged around by a stinging frenzy will be filled with turmoil and regret’ (577e1–3). After calling attention to the fact that the whole soul is the proper unit of evaluation (577e2; cf. 579e2–3), Plato notes that the tyrannical soul will not even be able to acquire the things it most covets, lacking as it does the freedom and composure required to implement any stable plan of action (cf. 579c3–d2). Such a soul, he concludes in concert with Glaucon, will surely be the soul of the wretched (580a1–d2). There is no reason to suppose that the tyrant is characteristically akratic, or even that his implementation failures are locally voluntary. Instead, as Plato portrays him, the tyrant gets his comeuppance by being confined to his house, like a woman, he says, afraid to venture out for fear of bodily harm (579b3–c2).

Looked at from this perspective, homuncularism does nothing to explain the pitiable lives lived by the unjust. On the contrary, here again it is noteworthy that Plato twice insists that the whole soul is the unit of evaluation (577e1–3, 579e2–3) and lays the ills suffered by the worst of the unjust on their inability to acquire what their craven souls desire—not because they are akratic, but because their earlier decisions constrain their later options in life. So, (ii), the suggestion that homuncularism plays a special role in understanding the problems encountered by the akratic, is unwarranted. This only further reflects the fact that Plato’s dominant interest in soul-division is not the legitimizing of *akrasia*.

Turning to (i), the suggestion that Plato in fact embraces the homuncular theory in the *Republic*, the data is again mixed at best. As we

have seen, the standard reasoning runs that we find Plato ascribing features to the parts of the soul normally associated with autonomous agents: he suggests that each part has its own proprietary pleasures (580d3–587e4); that one part may discourse with another so that one may endeavor to persuade another as to its way of seeing things (442b5–d1, 554c11–e5, 589a6–b6); that individual parts may wish and want (437b1–c10, 439a1–d2); and so forth. Focusing on this sort of practice, we might then infer that in treating them as agentlike, Plato is regarding them as agents. Thus, for example, we might think of each part of the soul as having its own pleasures, in the way that four parties to a game of bridge might each have individual pleasures in the progression of play. This would in turn suggest that each part of the soul was an autonomous agent, sometimes co-operating with the others and sometimes not.

All such inferences are unstable, along two dimensions. In the first instance, Plato does not always say so baldly what he is represented as saying by way of characterizing the parts of the soul in agentive terms. For example, he does say that there are pleasures peculiar (*idia*) to each of the parts of the soul, as well as desires (*epithumiai*) and forms of rule (*archai*): ‘There being three <parts>, there seem to me three pleasures, one peculiar to each one, and similarly desires and forms of rule’ (580d7–8). But when asked to explain his meaning, he immediately reverts to speaking of the person (*anthrôpos*) as agent, using his characteristic if cumbersome way of speaking:

We say that in the first instance there is that by which a person learns, and then that by which he grows angry, while the third, because it is multiform, we were unable to call by any one name peculiar to it, but instead named it after that which was greatest and strongest within it, for this we called the *epithumêtikon*... (580d10–e3)<sup>27</sup>

This seems a far cry from asserting that the pleasures are experienced by discrete soul parts in isolation from one another; but this is presumably the sort of suggestion lying beneath the inference from peculiar pleasures to individual agency.

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<sup>27</sup> Τὸ μέν, φαμέν, ἦν ᾧ μανθάνει ἄνθρωπος, τὸ δὲ ᾧ θυμοῦται, τὸ δὲ τρίτον διὰ πολυειδίαν ἐνὶ οὐκ ἔσχομεν ὀνόματι προσεῖπεν ἰδίῳ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ ὁ μέγιστον καὶ ἰσχυρότατον εἶχεν ἐν αὐτῷ, τοῦτ' ἐπωνομάσαμεν· ἐπιθυμητικὸν γὰρ αὐτὸ κεκλήκαμεν...

Moreover, when Plato does speak in agentive terms of the faculties of soul, as he indisputably does, e.g. at 442b–d, it does not yet follow that he is thinking of them as literal agents, or even as literal quasi-agents. We would, I think, be hard pressed to infer from ‘She followed the exhortations of her heart’ to ‘Her heart is an agent, an agent with which she is non-identical and which in fact leads her around by exhorting her and telling her what to do.’ There seems no more reason to ascribe such an odd and unwanted inference to Plato than there is to shackle ourselves with it.

We might, of course, be motivated to find in Plato some drive for homuncularism if we found him relying explicitly or implicitly on some such metaphysical psychology in an effort to model *akrasia*. But we have not found him arguing in this way; nor would he be advised to do so. The theory does nothing to explain narrow *akrasia*, the sort in the sights of Socrates’ argument of the *Protagoras*. Moreover, the theory seems problematic in its own terms, employing at best a postponement strategy for coming to grips with such puzzles as there may be surrounding the phenomenology of *akrasia*. It is, consequently, welcome that we have no compelling grounds to read Plato as adopting homuncularism.

Now, there may well be a reasonable tendency to respond to these doubts about homuncularism by insisting that they have all been overly literal, indeed remorselessly and perversely so. No-one really thinks of *homunculi* as *homines*: They are *little* men not because they are tiny little fellows living in the same skeleton but because they are not real, fully formed men. They are not, and were never intended to be, autonomous agents with no access relations to one another’s states. Instead, they are characterized as *homunculi* precisely to capture an important and easily overlooked datum of Plato’s tri-partite moral psychology, namely that none of the three parts of Plato’s soul is saturated by its dominant feature.

Talk of *homunculi* in this deflationary vein might be mainly unobjectionable. To speak of *homunculi* in this way would be to speak picturesquely. One may suppose that there is no harm in speaking thus picturesquely—as long as we know what is being pictured. What, though, *is* being pictured in the attempt to explain *akrasia* by deploying a model of agents or quasi-agents interacting, bartering, bickering, and dominating? Such an approach has no tendency to prove any rejoinder to Socrates’ doubts about narrow *akrasia*, with its commitment to highly unified agency. On the contrary, no version of the homuncular

theory even engages his argument. It would be preferable, then, not to understand Plato as failing in this way.

### *Conclusions*

These considerations yield two overarching consequences for our understanding of Plato's moral psychology, each in its own way pointing to an enriched appreciation of the theory adumbrated in the *Republic*. First, whatever inadequacies may attend to Plato's account of soul division, the account of tri-partition should not be viewed as a failed attempt to model *akrasia*. That is, once homuncularism is rejected, it becomes plausible to find generic implementation failure, but not narrow *akrasia*, as a fate all too ordinary in the lives of weakly unified agents. Still, and this is the second consequence, in the *Republic* generic implementation failure follows upon lack of agentic unity. The non-unified agent is subject to all manner of unremarkable implementation failure, because she is a person who is constitutionally incoherent. Standing apart from such an unfortunate creature will be the just person who, in order to qualify as just in the first place, will have achieved a high degree of psychological unity. The just person, as highly unified, will be no more liable to akratic conduct than was Socrates' highly unified hedonist.

From these results two further corollaries follow. First, it is inappropriate to speak of *the* moral psychology of the *Republic* as correcting or superceding the moral psychology of the *Protagoras*; for the *Republic* contains not one, but two moral psychologies, one of which is *mutatis mutandis* the highly unified psychology of the *Protagoras*. There is thus a fundamental form of continuity between Socratic and Platonic attitudes towards narrow *akrasia*. Second, key to understanding Plato's moral psychology is an appreciation of his fundamental commitment to the goodness of unity. Psychic unity is preferable to psychic disarray, not least because unity alone begets human flourishing. Plato is deeply interested in the inferiority of the unjust, because he is striving to show how the just life is preferable to the unjust. He concludes that the unjust man is unhappy not because he is somehow many men, but because he is insufficiently integrated and so not the one man he would really rather be.

## THIRST AS DESIRE FOR GOOD\*

ROSLYN WEISS

It is widely believed that it is possible to identify in *Republic* IV the precise place at which Plato departs from the Socrates of earlier dialogues regarding the psychology of choice, that is, regarding how a person chooses among the various alternatives that are open to him.<sup>1</sup> According to this view—I shall refer to it as ‘the standard view’<sup>2</sup>—the early Socrates believes that in the final analysis a man cannot but choose in accordance with his rational judgment concerning what is best. As Socrates says at *Prot.* 358c–d, human nature does not permit a man to choose an option that appears to him worse than another. Implicit in this allegedly Socratic position is an ‘intellectualism’ that precludes the possibility that one’s emotions and appetites might overcome one’s rational deliberation. *Akrasia* is denied. But, the standard view maintains, all this changes in *Rep.* IV, where Plato introduces into the soul three parts or powers. Here, presumably, intellectualism ends as *akrasia* is affirmed. In Book IV of the *Republic* the reasoning part or element of the soul (the *logistikon*) at times overrides the clamorings of appetite and emotion—this is what happens most of the time in a man who has a healthy and ordered soul—but at other times appetite (the *epithumêtikon*) or the spirited or emotional part (the *thumoeides*) prevails. On this conception of human choice, it is indeed possible for someone to believe that alternative *x* is better for him than alternative *y* yet choose alternative *y* because his desire for food, drink, or sex, or the

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<sup>1</sup> Somewhat remarkably, many scholars unflinchingly identify the Socrates of the *Republic* with Plato and the Socrates of the ‘early’ dialogues with Socrates. See, e.g., Reeve (1992), x; Klosko (1986), 70; Pohlenz (1913), 156–57; Walsh (1963), Chapter 11; Cooper (1984), 31; Shields (2001), 137–39; Bobonich (1994), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Proponents of this view include: Irwin (1995), 209; Reeve (1992), 113, n. 9, also (1998), 134–35; Brickhouse and Smith (1994), 90, n. 25, and 98, n. 35; Parry (1996), 93–94; Penner (1992—in Kraut), 129; Vlastos (1988), 99 and 105; Taylor (1991), 203; Davidson (1980), 35; Watson (1977), 320.

craving for prestige or power, or the feeling of fear or hope overcomes his reason, his deliberation, his calculation.<sup>3</sup>

It is not just upon the new division of the soul into three parts, however, that the standard view relies. It draws support, too, from the following passage in the text:

Now let no one catch us unprepared, I said, and cause a disturbance, alleging that no one desires drink, but good drink, nor food, but good food; for everyone, after all, desires good things. If, then, thirst is a desire, it would be for good drink or for good whatever it is, and similarly with the other desires. (438a)<sup>4</sup>

According to the standard view, when Socrates in this passage alerts Glaucon to an irksome objector who might try to confuse them, he is referring to himself, or to an earlier version of himself, that is, to the Socrates of the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*.<sup>5</sup> It is this Socrates who, it is thought, thinks everyone desires that which he regards as good, or best, for himself. Thus, according to the standard view, what Socrates cautions his new self and Glaucon to be on guard against is a view that he had formerly held but which he now regards as a superficially plausible but nevertheless illegitimate objection to his current view that thirst is desire for drink rather than for good drink.

It is questionable, however, on the one hand, that Socrates thinks the offending objector is none other than himself as he appears in other dialogues presumed to predate the *Republic*, and, on the other, that he here regards as false the proposition that ‘everyone desires good things’ (*pantes... tōn agathōn epithumousin*—438a3–4).

Let us consider first what it is that Socrates finds objectionable in the hypothetical objection he raises; second, whether the so-called early Socrates qualifies as the putative objector; and third, whether and in what sense Socrates contends in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno* that all men desire good things.

<sup>3</sup> Ironically, the view expressed by Socrates in the *Republic*, a view that many scholars regard as a great advance in moral psychology over the primitive intellectualism of the ‘early’ Socrates (see, e.g., Grube (1958), 131, and Cooper (1984), 31) is not substantially different from the view attributed to the many in the *Protagoras*.

<sup>4</sup> Μῆτοι τις, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἀσκέπτους ἡμᾶς ὄντας θορυβῆσθαι, ὥς οὐδεὶς ποτοῦ ἐπιθυμεῖ ἀλλὰ χρηστοῦ ποτοῦ, καὶ οὐ σίτου ἀλλὰ χρηστοῦ σίτου. πάντες γὰρ ἄρα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν· εἰ οὖν ἡ δίψα ἐπιθυμία ἐστὶ, χρηστοῦ ἂν εἴη εἴτε πώματος εἴτε ἄλλου ὅτου ἐστὶν ἐπιθυμία, καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι οὕτω. Translations of passages in the *Republic* are taken from Bloom (1968) and are occasionally modified slightly.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Penner (1971), 96; Vlastos (1991), 86, n. 22; Siewert (2001), 338; Murphy (1951), 28–29; Penner (1992), 129; Irwin (1995), 206; Shields (2001), 138–39, with reservations.



1. *The Objection*

According to the standard view, Socrates maintains in *Rep.* IV, contrary to what he had maintained in earlier dialogues, that people desire drink—but not necessarily good drink—when they are thirsty. Moreover, the standard view asserts, Socrates now, in order to hold this new view, disavows his earlier view that ‘everyone desires good things.’

Three considerations, however, tell against the idea that Socrates means to discredit in *Rep.* IV the view that ‘everyone desires good things.’ First, he devotes no effort to disproving it. He mentions it but once, never to return to it again. The notion to which he does take exception and which he does work to discredit is a different one, viz. ‘no one desires drink, but only good drink, or food, but only good food.’

Second, although it is possible to think, along with the standard view, that if Socrates rejects the conclusion that thirst is for good drink, hunger for good food, then he must similarly reject the notion from which this conclusion derives, viz. that everyone desires good things, there may be another alternative. For how certain is it that the notion that thirst is for drink simpliciter—and not necessarily for good drink—is incompatible with the notion that everyone desires good things? Might it not be the case that Socrates believes *both* that everyone desires good things and that thirst is for drink simpliciter?

There is, fortunately, a rather broad textual indication that Socrates indeed sees no incompatibility between the proposition that everyone desires good things and the proposition that thirst is for drink simpliciter rather than specifically for good drink. Within the syllogism: (1) Everyone desires good things; (2) Thirst is a form of desire; hence (3) Thirst is for good drink (rather than for drink simpliciter), the Greek term used for ‘good’ changes. In premiss (1), good things are *agatha*. In the conclusion, however, good drink is not *poton* (or *pôma*) *agathon* but *poton chrêston*.<sup>6</sup> The distinction between *agathon* and *chrêston* is lost in the translation of both as ‘good,’ but the shift in terms is significant.<sup>7</sup> For things can be appealing or attractive in themselves, and hence good things, *agatha*, regardless of whether they are also beneficial, and hence *chrêsta*. If thirst is for drink alone, drink alone is the good thing (*agathon*) that is its object. When the soul that desires food or drink nods assent to itself upon seeing its desired object (437b), it sees that food or drink

<sup>6</sup> See *Gorgias* 499c, where it is *chrêstai* pleasures that *should* be chosen.

<sup>7</sup> Allen (1991) renders *chrêston* ‘wholesome’, as does Cornford (1945).

as a good thing, that is, as something desirable, but not necessarily as something good *for* itself, that is, as something beneficial. In other words, what Socrates finds objectionable in the hypothetical objection is not its insistence that everyone desires *agatha*, but its assumption that *if* everyone desires *agatha*, then everyone desires things they determine to be *chrêsta*. The premiss that everyone desires good things (*agatha*) hardly compels the conclusion that everyone desires beneficial things (*chrêsta*).

We have thus far noted two reasons for thinking that it is not the proposition ‘everyone desires good things (*agatha*)’ to which Socrates objects, but the inference from the proposition ‘everyone desires good things’ to the conclusion that thirst or hunger is for good drink or good food. The first was that Socrates expends no effort at all on discrediting ‘everyone desires good things’; the proposition he attacks is ‘thirst is for good drink.’ The second is that the term Socrates uses for ‘good’ shifts from *agathon* in premiss (1) to *chrêston* in the conclusion, suggesting that the difficulty lies not in premiss (1) but rather in the illegitimate transition from premiss (1) to the conclusion.

There is, however, yet a third reason to think that what Socrates finds objectionable is not ‘everyone desires good things’ but rather the inference from that proposition to the conclusion that ‘thirst is for good drink.’ In the passage that immediately precedes the one currently under discussion Socrates also imagines a possible objector to watch out for, and in that instance there can be no doubt that it is not the objector’s premiss that Socrates rejects but the conclusion that the hypothetical objector derives from it. The structure of the earlier passage parallels precisely the structure of our own. In both passages Socrates begins with a declaration of his own view (436b–c corresponding to 437d–e). He then goes on to warn about a hypothetical objector (436c–d corresponding to 438a). Next he explains why the objector’s conclusion is incorrect (436c–e corresponding to 438a–439a). And finally Socrates reaffirms the position with which he began (436e–437a corresponding to 439a–b).

Let us look at the earlier passage. Socrates begins by announcing his position:

It is plain that the same thing will not be willing at the same time to do or to suffer opposites with respect to the same part and in relation to the same thing. So if we should ever find that happening in these things, we will know that they were not the same but many. (436b–c)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Δῆλον ὅτι ταὐτὸν τάναντία ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν κατὰ ταῦτόν γε καὶ πρὸς ταὐτὸν οὐκ

After Socrates states his view, he warns that someone might object that if a man stands in one place and also moves his arms and his head, does he not stand and move at the same time?; or, if a top spins and at the same time stays in one place, is not the top simultaneously both at rest and in motion?

Socrates immediately responds to the imagined objector by showing him the error in his thinking. Socrates readily admits that a man can stand in one place and move his arms and head, or that a top can spin yet remain in place. What he is not prepared to accept is that this state of affairs compels the conclusion that a man or a top can do two opposite things at the same time *with respect to the same part of himself or itself*. Socrates recognizes that the man and the top are both in motion and at rest at the same time; what he denies is that the man and the top are in these two opposite states simultaneously with respect to the same part of himself/itself. He accepts the objector's premiss but rejects his conclusion.

And so Socrates concludes:

Then the saying of such things will not scare us, or any the more persuade us, that something that is the same, at the same time, with respect to the same part and in relation to the same thing, could ever suffer, be, or do opposites. (436e–437a)<sup>9</sup>

If we turn now to our passage, we see precisely the same progression as we have just seen concerning the earlier one. At 437d–e, Socrates states his position:

Insofar as it is thirst, would it be a desire in the soul for something more than that of which we say it is a desire? For example, is thirst thirst for hot drink or cold, or much or little, or, in a word, for any particular kind of drink? Or is it not rather that in the case where heat is present in addition to the thirst, the heat would cause the desire to be also for something cold as well; and where coldness, something hot; and where the thirst is much on account of the presence of muchness, it will cause the desire to be for much, and where it is little, for little? But, thirsting itself will never be a desire for anything other than that of which it naturally is a desire—for drink alone—and, similarly, hungering will be a desire for food?<sup>10</sup>

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ἐθελήσει ἅμα, ὥστε ἂν που εὐρίσκωμεν ἐν αὐτοῖς ταῦτα γιγνόμενα, εἰσόμεθα ὅτι οὐ ταῦτόν ἦν ἀλλὰ πλείω.

<sup>9</sup> Οὐδὲν ἄρα ἡμᾶς τῶν τοιούτων λεγόμενον ἐκπλήξει, οὐδὲ μᾶλλον τι πείσει ὥς ποτέ τι ἂν τὸ αὐτὸ ὂν ἅμα κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ πρὸς τὸ αὐτὸ τάναντία πάθοι ἢ καὶ εἴη ἢ καὶ ποιήσειεν.

<sup>10</sup> Ἄρ' οὖν, καθ' ὅσον δίψα ἐστὶ, πλέονος ἂν τινος ἢ οὐ λέγομεν ἐπιθυμία ἐν τῇ

Socrates immediately goes on to express the objection of the putative objector who takes exception to the principle Socrates just established. The objector objects that since everyone desires good things, must not thirst, which is a desire, be for good drink?

If the course of this passage duplicates that of the earlier one then we may presume that what Socrates means to say to the objector in our passage is just like what he says to the objector in the earlier one, viz. that though his premiss is true, his conclusion does not follow from it. In our case, what Socrates would be saying is that even if it is true that everyone desires good things, it still does not follow that thirst, which is a desire, is for *beneficial* drink. Just as in the earlier passage there was no doubt about the veracity of the premiss that a man can stand still but move his arms and head yet it was shown that that premiss was insufficient to discredit the principle that a thing cannot do two opposite things at the same time with respect to the same part of itself, so, too, here, the premiss that everyone desires good things (*agatha*) is certainly true, yet it does not follow from this true premiss that thirst is desire for beneficial (*chrêston*) drink.

Indeed, just as Socrates in the earlier passage had returned to restate his original position, so, too, here does Socrates reaffirm the position with which he began:

So a particular sort of thirst is for a particular kind of drink, but thirst itself is neither for much nor little, good nor bad, nor, in a word, for any particular kind, but thirst itself is naturally only for drink. (...) Therefore, the soul of the man who is thirsty, insofar as it thirsts, wants nothing other than to drink, and strives for this and is impelled toward it. (439a–b)<sup>11</sup>

What I have claimed up to this point is that Socrates finds objectionable the derivation of the conclusion that thirst is for beneficial drink from the premiss that desire always takes good things as its object. The

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ψυχῇ εἶη, οἷον δίψα ἐστὶ δίψα ἅρά γε θερμοῦ ποτοῦ ἢ ψυχροῦ, ἢ πολλοῦ ἢ ὀλίγου, ἢ καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ ποιοῦ τινος πώματος; ἢ ἐὰν μὲν τις θερμότης τῷ δίψει προσῇ, τὴν τοῦ ψυχροῦ ἐπιθυμίαν προσπαρέχοιτ' ἂν, ἐὰν δὲ ψυχρότης, τὴν τοῦ θερμοῦ; ἐὰν δὲ διὰ πλῆθους παρουσίαν πολλὴ ἢ δίψα ᾖ, τὴν τοῦ πολλοῦ παρέξεται, ἐὰν δὲ ὀλίγη, τὴν τοῦ ὀλίγου; αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ διψῆν οὐ μὴ ποτε ἄλλου γένηται ἐπιθυμία ἢ οὐπερ πέφυκεν, αὐτοῦ πώματος, καὶ αὐτὸ πεινῆν βρώματος;

<sup>11</sup> Οὐκοῦν ποιοῦ μὲν τινος πώματος ποιόν τι καὶ δίψος, δίψος δ' οὖν αὐτὸ οὔτε πολλοῦ οὔτε ὀλίγου, οὔτε ἀγαθοῦ οὔτε κακοῦ, οὐδ' ἐνὶ λόγῳ ποιοῦ τινος, ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ πώματος μόνον αὐτὸ δίψος πέφυκεν; (...) Τοῦ διψῶντος ἅρα ἡ ψυχὴ, καθ' ὅσον διψῇ, οὐκ ἄλλο τι βούλεται ἢ πεινῆν, καὶ τούτου ὀρέγεται καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦτο ὁρμά.

premiss itself, however, I have argued, is not one Socrates rejects: he says nothing about it at all; he shifts from *agathon* to *chrêston*, showing thereby that the fault lies in the transition from premiss to conclusion rather than in the premiss itself; and in the passage that directly precedes our own he similarly does not reject the hypothetical objector's premiss but only takes exception to the objector's misguided and brazen supposition that his premiss necessitates the negation of Socrates' principle.

Why does Socrates accept the premiss of the objector in the first passage? He accepts it because it is simply true that a man who is standing still can move his feet and head; it is simply true that a top that is in one place can spin at the same time. But not much follows from these simple facts. What Socrates sees and shows is that this phenomenon has no bearing on the principle that he established, that this phenomenon poses no threat to his principle. Even though a man who is standing still can move his limbs, and even though a stationary top can spin, nevertheless one thing cannot do two opposite things with the same part of itself at the same time, from the same perspective, and with respect to the same thing.

And this is precisely what happens in our passage. Although it is true that everyone desires good things, this truth is a trivial one. It obtains when one assigns to the word 'good' the broadest possible sense, such that an object that attracts or appeals in any way, an object that is regarded as having positive value of any kind, is a 'good thing.' In other words, to say that all who desire something good is to say something true, albeit trivial, when anything that is attractive in any way counts as a good thing.<sup>12</sup> It says little more than that it is not possible to desire something that in no way appeals but, on the contrary, repels. But this near-tautology, like the recognition in the previous passage that a man who stands in one place can move his arms, poses no danger to Socrates' principle. Even if it is impossible for someone to desire something repugnant, it does not follow that thirst is for beneficial drink, that is, for drink that the agent determines to be something that is useful and profitable for him.

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<sup>12</sup> See *Gorg.* 466–468, where the only things that cannot be desired in themselves are bad and intermediate things, that is, things that are not attractive in any way.

## 2. *Is Socrates the Objector?*

Because those who endorse the standard view think that Socrates now regards as false the premiss of the objection, they do not take that premiss to be trivial or tautological but take it rather to be making a substantive claim. In other words, they assimilate *agathon* to *chrêston*; they keep the sense of ‘good’ constant from premiss to conclusion, taking both *agathon* and *chrêston* to mean beneficial. Since they believe that the Socrates who appears in the dialogues that Plato wrote before the *Republic* in fact endorses the premiss in its substantive sense, they believe, too, that Socrates is the objector and that it is only in the *Republic* that he (or Plato) recognizes his error and changes his mind.

In general, however, on those occasions on which Socrates introduces an objector into a discussion the objector is not Socrates himself.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the objector in the passage immediately preceding our own, *Rep.* IV, 436–437, is quite evidently not Socrates himself. Since the parallels between the two passages are, as we have seen, quite striking, it is hardly credible that the objector in the first passage would not be Socrates himself but the objector in the second passage would be.

But if the objector is not Socrates, why does Socrates introduce him into the discussion? At least three reasons suggest themselves. First, there are many people who do indeed think that food, drink, sex, etc., are the ‘good things’—and not in the trivial sense of ‘good’ that we previously stipulated, viz. attractive, but in the more significant sense of beneficial and good *for* one. (Callicles holds such a view in the *Gorgias*.) By flagging the point, Socrates seizes the opportunity to dispute it: the fact that food is desired by a hungry man does not mean that it is beneficial for him.

Second, if all desiring involves the assessment that something is good in the sense of being beneficial and useful, then reason loses its distinctive role. What Socrates wants to make understood is that the experience of being attracted is hardly the same as, and is often at odds with, the experience of intellectual deliberation concerning benefit and harm. The objector’s syllogism is unsuccessful because even if it is true that everyone desires things that appeal (‘good’ in the banal sense—*agathon*),

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<sup>13</sup> See *Ap.* 20c4–d1, 28b3–5; *Crito* 48a10–b2; and the end of the *Protagoras*. There are many other examples that could be cited.

it does not follow that everyone desires what is profitable and beneficial ('good' in the substantive sense—*chrêston*).

Third—and most importantly—it is likely that the objector is not just anyone but is actually Glaucon, Socrates' interlocutor. Indeed, Glaucon responds approvingly when presented with the objection: 'Perhaps,' he says, 'the man who says that would seem to make sense' (*Isôs gar an... dokoi ti legein ho tauta legôn*—*Rep.* IV, 438a6). Glaucon's response is reminiscent of Crito's when Crito finds himself in a similar situation in the *Crito*. When Socrates in the *Crito* at 48a puts into the mouth of some imagined objector the objection that there is good reason to attend to the view of the many because the many can kill us, Crito quickly agrees that there is something to be said for this objection. Socrates exploits the opportunity to explain to Crito—again—that what the many think is not important because it is not death but the committing of injustice that is the worst thing for a man. Socrates raises the objection because he knows that Crito supports the objector's point of view: Crito had already said at 44d1–5 that one must be concerned about the views of the many because they can do one the greatest harm. Is there, however, anything in what Glaucon had said earlier in the *Republic* that would cause Socrates to raise this objection on his behalf?

If we think back to *Rep.* II where Glaucon enumerates three classes of goods, we note that in setting forth even the goods of the first category which are the pleasures that we desire only for their own sake and not for their consequences, Glaucon cannot resist appending the following qualification: 'which are harmless and leave no after-effects' (*hosai abla-beis kai mêden eis ton epeita chronon dia tautas gignetai*—*Rep.* II, 357b7–8). If Glaucon excludes from his three classes of good things anything that brings harm in its wake, then, it seems, he is unable to recognize as good things things that are objects of raw, irrational desire unsupplemented and untempered by rational considerations.<sup>14</sup> For that reason Socrates is obliged to explain to Glaucon in *Rep.* IV that it is possible for a man to desire even something harmful, for not all desiring takes into account benefit and harm. The determination that the object desired causes no

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<sup>14</sup> Ferrari (2003), 16, takes note of what he calls Glaucon's hauteur, and attributes to that hauteur Glaucon's desire to keep the goodness of justice pure, confined to the soul and untainted by the worldly goods to which it might lead. It might well be, too, that Glaucon's hauteur keeps him from giving raw desire its due and recognizing its objects as constituting a class of 'goods.'

harm is itself an operation of reason and not of desire. Thirst is for drink—not for drink that is not harmful.

In the *Crito* Socrates does not disagree with the objector that the many can kill us. Nevertheless, it does not therefore follow for him that the many's views ought to be accorded any weight. Similarly, in *Rep.* IV Socrates does not disagree with the objector that all people desire good things. Nevertheless, it does not follow for him that all the good things that men desire are things that they judge beneficial.

### 3. *Desire in the Protagoras, Gorgias, and Meno*

Hunger and thirst in *Rep.* IV, then, are nonintellectualized desires. They are primitive, irrational (*alogiston*—439d7) cravings for food and drink respectively. Thirst is what leads the soul 'like a beast' to drink; such a soul wants nothing but to drink (439b). Drink—not good (beneficial) drink—is the good thing that thirst craves.<sup>15</sup>

*Epithumein* in *Rep.* 4 is used broadly. It encompasses *ethelein* and *boulesthai*, along with *ephiesthai* (longing): 'Will you not say,' Socrates asks Glaucon, 'that the soul of a man who desires (*epithumountas*) either longs for (*ephiesthai*) what it desires (*epithumêi*) or embraces that which it wants (*boulêtai*) to become its own; or again, that insofar as the soul wills (*ethelei*) that something be supplied to it, it nods assent to itself as though it had posed a question and reaches out toward the fulfillment [of what it wills]?' (437c1–6). And *boulesthai* replaces *epithumein* at 439b, where the soul of a man who is thirsty is said to 'want' (*boulêtai*) nothing other than to drink. (See also *Rep.* III, 390c, where Socrates speaks of Zeus who, being so full of desire for Hera, wants [*boulomenon*] to have intercourse right there on the ground; and IV, 426c, where Socrates

<sup>15</sup> For an opposing view see Carone (2001), 107–148. Carone argues that even in the *Republic* synchronic *akrasia* is impossible. For her, all desire remains for good as benefit; choices are always directed toward what is judged good, toward what reason approves, however momentarily. But surely in order for the principle of noncontradiction to work, the irrational desire to drink and the rational unwillingness to do so must be simultaneous: one part bids and the other forbids at the same time. In the struggle, sometimes reason wins, but at other times it loses. Appetite wins not, as Carone would have it (140), when it succeeds in persuading reason that it ought to follow appetite's dictates. On the contrary, appetite wins when it overpowers reason. (Even in Book VIII where Socrates describes what happens when the lowest part of the soul comes to dominate it, what he says is that reason is coerced into doing appetite's bidding. He does not say, however, that reason acquiesces in appetite's conception of the good.)



speaks of the ruler who gratifies the citizens by flattering and knowing their wants [*tas boulêseis*] beforehand.)

To be sure, there are occasions in Plato when *epithumein* and *boulesthai* are sharply distinguished. In the *Charmides*, for instance, at 167e4–5, Socrates says fairly explicitly that the objects of *epithumein* are pleasures but the objects of *boulesthai* goods. In the *Meno*, at 77e–78b, where Socrates considers with Meno the case of those who desire bad things while recognizing the connection between being bad and being harmful, Socrates is careful to distinguish between *epithumein* and *boulesthai*: those who desire (*epithumein*) bad things and get them do not do what they want (*boulesthai*), because no one wants (*boulesthai*) to be harmed and hence wretched.

More often, however, the two terms are used interchangeably, since each has a sense broad enough to encompass the other: each can include both the primitive appetitive craving normally associated with *epithumein* and the reasoned preference for benefit normally associated with *boulesthai*. In the *Protagoras*, where Socrates chides Prodicus for his obsessive fondness for overly fine distinctions, he makes explicit reference to Prodicus's distinguishing between *epithumein* and *boulesthai* (*Prot.* 340a8–b1). In the *Lysis* Socrates says of Lysis's parents, who love their son, that they surely would want (*boulounto*—207d7), or desire (*epithumoi*—207e2), that he be happy, and therefore would presumably allow him to do whatever he wants (*ha boulei*—207e6), or whatever he desires (*hôn an epithumeis*—207e7). In general, the expressions 'whatever they desire' and 'whatever they want' are used in Plato with no discernible difference in meaning.<sup>16</sup> The *Gorgias* uses *boulesthai* throughout the early part of the dialogue, understanding it broadly enough to comprehend all ways in which one can be drawn to something. Thus, when Socrates says to Polus in the *Gorgias* that no one can want (*boulesthai*) bad things or intermediate ones (468c6–7), Socrates does not mean that no one can regard these things as beneficial. On the contrary, it is when (and only when) one does regard such things as beneficial that one can choose them for the sake of their perceived benefits. And when Socrates tells Gorgias that a just man is one who does not want (*boulesthai*) to commit injustice (460c3), he does not mean that the just

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., *Laws* II, 661b: 'And then, by becoming a tyrant, to do *hoti an epithumêi*,' and *Laches* 179a7, where 'whatever they want' is *hoti boulontai*. Similarly in the argument at *Gorg.* 466–468.

man has assessed the commission of injustice as harmful to himself, but that he has no desire to commit injustice, that wrongdoing holds no appeal for him.

Although *Rep.* IV, then, unlike the *Meno* but like other Platonic dialogues, includes in the act of desiring (*epithumein*) all forms of desiring, both unreflective and reasoned, nevertheless it does call the appetitive part of the soul the *epithumétikon* (439d8 et passim) and does single out certain desires (*epithumiai*), thirst and hunger in particular, as primitive drives (437d–e). It is these that are not affected by the assessed profitability of their objects. The good things that hunger and thirst desire are food and drink, things that look good to a hungry and thirsty soul.<sup>17</sup>

There is nothing in Socrates' stand in the *Gorgias* or the *Meno* that is inconsistent with his stand in *Rep.* 4. In all three places people can desire—and choose—anything that strikes them as good in some way. And in neither the *Gorgias* nor the *Meno*, then, is there any suggestion that people can desire—and choose—only what they consider beneficial. The *Gorgias* contends at 467–468 only that one cannot want what is bad or intermediate, leaving wide open the possibility that one can want anything else. As long as a thing strikes one as good in some way, that is, as long as it neither strikes one as repugnant nor fails to strike one in any way at all, it can be wanted.<sup>18</sup> And later on in the *Gorgias*, when Socrates distinguishes between the good as beneficial, on the one hand, and the pleasant, on the other, both are nevertheless treated as things that can be wanted. Indeed, it is only because both the good and the pleasant can be wanted that Socrates can pose the question of which is to be pursued for the sake of which. In the *Meno*, even bad things, that is, things that are bad in the sense that they are judged harmful, can be desired. Indeed, it is bad things that are desired by those who are wretched. Yet even these bad things must, apart from the harm they are thought to bring, seem otherwise good—if they did not, why

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<sup>17</sup> At 436a10, Socrates asks if we desire (*epithumoumen*) the pleasures of nourishment and generation and all their kin with a third part of the soul, distinct from the one with which we learn and from the one with which we become spirited. Yet there is desire (*epithumétên einai*), too, for learning (475b8–9), and this desire appears to emanate not from the appetitive part but from the reasoning part of the soul.

<sup>18</sup> It is fair to say, then, that not only is the *Gorgias* not inconsistent with *Rep.* IV but both dialogues make precisely the same point. In contending that bad and intermediate things cannot be wanted, the *Gorgias* affirms in effect that everyone desires good things.

would they be desired at all? It must be presumed, then, that at the same time that these ‘bad things’ are judged harmful they are also perceived as pleasurable and, in that sense, as good.

*Rep.* IV, then, in which people can desire anything that they regard as good in some way—even food and drink simpliciter—is in complete accord with the *Gorgias* and the *Meno*. The reason it is perhaps difficult to see that accord is because ‘good things’ sometimes means things judged beneficial and sometimes means things that appeal, and ‘bad things’ sometimes means things judged harmful and sometimes means things that repel. Moreover, *epithumein* and *boulesthai*, as we have seen, can be used broadly or narrowly. The ‘good things’ (*agatha*) in *Rep.* IV—things that are attractive in some way—are the opposites of the *Gorgias*’s ‘bad things’ (*kaka*): things that are attractive in no way. And the *Meno*’s ‘bad things’—things regarded as harmful—are the opposites of *Rep.* IV’s ‘beneficial drink and beneficial food.’ The *Meno*’s bad things (= harmful things) cannot be ‘wanted’ (*boulesthai*) because *boulesthai* is restricted in the *Meno* and can apply only to things that are believed to be beneficial and not harmful; in the *Gorgias*, where *boulesthai* is not similarly restricted, bad things (= repugnant things) cannot be ‘wanted’ (*boulesthai*) in themselves no matter how beneficial they are judged to be: at most one can want to do them (*prattein auta*—468c4) for the sake of the benefit they bring. *Rep.* IV’s ‘beneficial drink and beneficial food,’ because they are things judged beneficial (*chrêston*), would qualify as things that could be wanted even on *boulesthai*’s restrictive sense, but drink and food that is not beneficial can be desired under the name ‘good things’ (*agatha*) in *Rep.* IV as they can in the *Meno* under the name ‘bad things’ (*kaka*).

It is only in the *Protagoras*, where the distinction between pleasure and good is dissolved and where people are transformed into rational pleasure- and pain-calculators, that no one can choose anything that is not also deemed the most beneficial of the available options. In the *Protagoras*, the ‘good things’ are pleasures, the ‘bad things’ are pains. But, unlike in the *Gorgias*, *Meno*, and *Republic*, pleasures and pains in the *Protagoras* are counted and compared; their immediate attractiveness and repugnance are discounted and reinterpreted as calculable amounts, sizes, or weights. Not surprisingly, then, it is only in the *Protagoras* that the possibility of *akrasia* is denied. *Rep.* IV is indeed out of step with the *Protagoras*. It proceeds, as do the *Gorgias* (especially in the discussion with Callicles, where pleasures must be controlled and disciplined and

not given free rein if one is to live well) and the *Meno*, on the assumption that *akrasia* is a rather common and familiar occurrence.<sup>19</sup> It would seem, then, that it is not *Rep.* IV but the *Protagoras* that represents a reversal of Socrates' views.

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<sup>19</sup> The scholarly preoccupation with the presumed reversal in the *Republic* of the alleged Socratic denial of *akrasia* has led to such views as the following one by Bobonich (1994), 27: '(...) my fundamental point still holds firm: they [the parts of the soul] are no longer [in the *Laws*] thought by Plato to be necessary for framing or solving the philosophical problems surrounding akratic action.' Bobonich here implies that in the *Republic* it is the soul's having parts that solves or dissolves the difficulties formerly engendered by the denial of *akrasia*. But surely it is the other way around: it is the assumption that *akrasia* is possible that is used to establish that the soul has parts.

## AKRASIA AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE PASSIONS IN PLATO'S *TIMAEUS*

GABRIELA ROXANA CARONE

At *Timaeus* 86d5–e3 we read:

And pretty much all the things that are called ‘lack of control over pleasures’ and a reproach, as if evils were voluntary, are not rightly reproached; for no one is voluntarily evil, but the evil become evil through some bad disposition of the body and uneducated upbringing, and these things are hateful to everyone and come to a person involuntarily.<sup>1</sup>

This might remind us of dialogues such as the *Protagoras*, in which we are told that ‘no one willingly goes towards bad things’ (358c) and it is denied that anyone who knows the best would be unwilling to do it if it is possible for him (352d). But there seems to be a large gap between the *Protagoras*—which is usually seen as a clear example of so-called Socratic ‘intellectualism’—and the *Timaeus*: in particular, the *Timaeus* allows for tripartition of the soul (a theory absent from the *Protagoras*), and consequently, one might think, of psychic conflict and therefore of *akrasia*, understood as a phenomenon by which intellect, even if knowing what is best, might be overridden by stronger, irrational forces.

Yet no such conclusion is implied by the passage of the *Timaeus*. The word translated as ‘lack of control’ is *akrateia*, part of an expression from which Timaeus explicitly distances himself by referring to it as the way this phenomenon is ‘called’ (*legetai*, d7); and this recalls a passage in the *Protagoras* that denies that one could be ruled (*kratêthênai*) by pleasure in the presence of knowledge (352b–c, cf. *kratiston* 352d2), despite the many’s talk of ‘being ruled by’ (*kratoumenos*, 352e2) pleasure, pain, and things of that sort. If we analyse the phenomenon in the light of other parts of Timaeus’ speech, we may wonder: what does this supposed ‘lack of control’ amount to? In addressing this question, I

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<sup>1</sup> Καὶ σχεδὸν δὴ πάντα ὅποσα ἡδονῶν ἀκράτεια καὶ ὄνειδος ὡς ἐκόντων λέγεται τῶν κακῶν, οὐκ ὀρθῶς ὀνειδίζεται· κακὸς μὲν γὰρ ἐκὼν οὐδεὶς, διὰ δὲ πονηρὰν ἔξιν τινὰ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἀπαίδευτον τροφήν ὁ κακὸς γίγνεται κακός, παντὶ δὲ ταῦτα ἐχθρὰ καὶ ἄκοντι προσγίγνεται. Translations are my own and are based on the Oxford Classical Text.

shall explore whether a consistent account of moral psychology can be extracted from the text of the *Timaeus* and whether the latter upholds the position that knowledge cannot be overcome by the passions.

### 1. *Lack of control and intellectual failure*

In this regard Timaeus' account of the structure of the rational soul and its experiences when it is implanted in a mortal body becomes enlightening. The rational soul (whose nature is qualitatively the same both in the cosmos and in humans, 41d) is described as composed of two Circles, that of the Same and that of the Other, and it is thanks to the ruling function of the Circle of the Same that the soul both knows the intelligible and can even have true judgements about the sensible through the Circle of the Other, which is in turn ruled by the Circle of the Same (37a–c, 43a–44a). It is also by following the Circle of the Same that the individual can attain rational control over his body and irrational affections (42c–d). However, when the soul is originally implanted in a mortal body, the bombarding of external stimuli causes all sorts of distortions in it, preventing the Circle of the Same from ruling, and shaking the Circle of the Other, so that the soul judges falsely and foolishly (cf. *anoëtoi*, 44a3). Such distortions are said to continue beyond infancy if a proper education is lacking, so that the person returns to Hades 'uninitiated and unintelligent' (*atelês kai anoëtos*, 44c3). From this perspective, we can say that *akrateia* in pleasures and pains, at 86d, would refer to the lack of control, or *kratos*, that has previously in the *Timaeus* been described as the proper function of the Circle of the Same (36c7, cf. 42c–d, 44a) which, if working properly, allows the soul to attain knowledge and also secures true judgements both in the intelligible and the sensible domains. But this means that such 'lack of control' can be described as an intellectual failure, quite in tune with the Socratic spirit of the *Protagoras*. All the *Timaeus* would be providing is a more sophisticated explanation of how such intellectual failure occurs, but not a denial that the phenomenon can be described in intellectual terms.

This makes all the more sense when we focus on one of the two factors by which, at *Tim.* 86d–e, the evil are said to become evil, namely, an 'uneducated upbringing' (*apaideuton trophên*, e2). In the *Protagoras*, it was the art of measurement, as one form of mathematical knowledge, that would save our lives and prevent us from regrets (356c–e). In the

*Timaeus*, it is likewise one form of mathematical knowledge—in this case, astronomy—that would have a similar function, as we are told that thanks to the study of the revolutions of *nous* in heaven it is possible to correct the revolutions of our thought (47b–c, cf. 39b4–c1), which underwent perturbations at our birth (43a–e), and achieve a happy life (47b–c, 90c–d). In fact, at *Tim.* 42b we are told that the person who dominates his passions through reason will live well and be happy; whilst at 90b–d we read that the person who thinks things immortal and divine will be happy, because he is always taking good care of the *daimôn* (reason) within him, by supplying it with the appropriate movements thanks to his following the revolutions of the All. While in the second passage reason is given the theoretical function of studying (at least)<sup>2</sup> astronomy, in the first it has the practical role of ruling over the passions. These two functions are undoubtedly interrelated, since correcting, through adequate learning, the wandering revolutions of our thought, and thus having them work properly, will enable them to rule (44a–b). In this light, we have reason to think that it is astronomy that is the study recommended, together with one's practices, as the means for us to escape evil and choose the opposite (87b6–8). We can further understand why astronomy is described as the same 'therapy' (*therapeia*) for everybody (*panti mia*, 90c6; cf. *hekaston dei* at 90d1), whilst it is either the failure to study astronomy or the improper study of it that explains why the soul misses out on virtue and happiness and thus has to fall into a sub-human condition (91d–e). From here we can infer that the talk of 'uneducated upbringing' at *Tim.* 86e most likely points to the study of astronomy as the branch of mathematical knowledge that enables us to attain happiness, in strongly intellectualist terms that are congenial with the Socratic spirit of earlier dialogues.

There is, however, an interesting qualification, related to the second factor invoked to explain involuntary wrong-doing: we are told in the *Timaeus* that the evil become evil by 'some bad disposition of the body and uneducated upbringing' (86e1–2). What does the body have to do with the explanation of vice? And how far, or how close, is this from the *Protagoras* description?

In the first place, one might say that physiology is one of those factors than can make a person incapable of pursuing the good. If, for example,

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<sup>2</sup> I say 'at least' because the 'things immortal and divine' with which one communes can also include the Forms: see my (1997).

one is born with a chronic cerebral disarrangement, one may not be able to help bad behaviour despite one's own best efforts and those of one's relatives and educators. Plato seems particularly aware of the effects of physiology on human conduct in the *Timaeus* (86b ff.),<sup>3</sup> but the *Protagoras* does open the door for a similar kind of scenario, by introducing the qualification that no one would willingly go towards the bad while it is *possible* for him not to do so (cf. 352d7, 358c1): in this regard the body, in the *Timaeus*, would be presented as one of those factors that would make him *incapable* of doing good (cf. 86c2–3, d6–7), and to this extent again the *Timaeus* would be seen as an elaboration of, rather than a departure from, the theory of the *Protagoras*.

Intellectual failure and the influence of the body may in fact be quite interrelated: if we look back to 43a–44c, we'll see that the body, at least at the beginning (i.e. in the infant) affects the soul to the point that our reason fails to judge properly: when the immortal soul is subjected to the flow of the body, the revolutions of the soul (Same and Other) become deformed, and because of this they attribute sameness and difference to external objects in a false way, absent any ruling role of the Circle of the Same. For this reason the soul is both *anous* at the beginning (before its orbits get settled and straightened, 44a–b) and can remain *anoëtos* until the end, a condition that is also described as being beset by the greatest disease (44c). Likewise, at 86b *anoia* is presented as a disease of the soul, which includes *mania* and *amathia*; and a good example of *mania* is sexual overindulgence (in which case the agent's soul is diseased and senseless (*aphrona*) because of his body, 86d), or, in general, excess of pleasures and pains, which makes a person 'least capable of participating in reason' (86c3); thus the evil should not be reproached as if they acted voluntarily (86d). But this is very different from conceding that one's physiological constitution, if deficient, is bound to make someone ethically powerless—just as suffering from a disease does not in itself mean one is incapable of curing it, nor does it mean that one cannot take steps to prevent it. For *Timaeus* does seem to believe that certain practices are sufficient to prevent illness, especially if they are administered from childhood: that is why one should attribute responsibility for evils to 'the educators more than the educated, and the begetters more than the begotten' (87b4–6). But this is not to say

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. here the discussion in Gill (2000).



that the educated and begotten should not be responsible at all.<sup>4</sup> Even when one may be lacking a fortunate upbringing, Timaeus still recommends that the individual should do everything in his power to correct his poor upbringing or bodily condition: and so we are told that, in any case, one must endeavour, ‘through one’s nurture, studies and pursuits, as far as one can (*hopêi tis dunatai*), to escape evil and choose its opposite’ (b6–8). Along similar lines, we are told that the gods are commanded to govern the mortal creature in the finest way, ‘except insofar as it should become responsible (*aition*) for its own evils’ (42e3–4). Thus, gymnastics, an adequate diet, and in general the harmonious interaction between body and soul is something the individual must seek to practice even if these conditions are not originally given to him.

So, given that the body *can* be (and for some period of human life actually is) a source of lack of control of reason, the *Timaeus* passes on to recommend proper practices to have *both* body and soul in good order (87c ff.): we are emphatically told that ‘no proportion or disproportion is more important for health and disease, virtue and vice, than that existing between body and soul themselves’ (87d1–3); in this way we are encouraged to cultivate the required balance through gymnastics and general education (87c–88e). This may be taken as a sign of the mind-body union that we can find in late Plato, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, speaking in general terms about the care and health of every living being (*zôion*), Timaeus states that in order to avoid disproportion between body and soul the only solution is to move (*kinein*) neither soul without body, nor body without soul, 87d, 88b (and then, e.g., practice gymnastics together with mathematics, 88c); the best movement for our rational soul being promoted by the study of the kindred motions of the universe (90c–d).

At the same time, however, we are left wondering whether there may not be cases in which one may just be unlucky enough to be irreversibly born with the wrong physiological make-up (think e.g. of cases of inherited madness resulting in vicious behaviour), and/or live within social structures which entrench rather than combat vice (cf. 87a–b): to this extent, luck, we might think, is an antecedent component that must be present if reason is to control a person, just as the *Protagoras* had introduced the qualification that one is bound to pursue the good

<sup>4</sup> Pace Strange (2000), 411.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. my (2005c).

as long as that is *possible* for him. Likewise the *Philebus* remarks that, if anyone chose other things than the good, ‘he would have chosen unwillingly, against the nature of what is truly choiceworthy, through ignorance or some unhappy necessity’ (22b).

## 2. *Lack of control and tripartition of the soul*

So far so good. But things seem to become more complicated as soon as we realize that the *Timaeus* not only works with a bipartite scheme (body and soul, cf. 88a–b) but also introduces a theory of tripartition of the soul, whose like is found in the *Republic*, the dialogue usually taken to represent a radical departure from Socratic intellectualism precisely by allowing complexity of the soul (thus seeming to concede that one may be motivated by irrational factors even when reason is fully aware that it is better not to be). Now, there is a trivial way of resolving the tension: for one could say that in the *Timaeus* the lower parts of the soul are said to supervene inevitably (*ex anankês*, 42a3–4, cf. 69c8–d1) when the immortal soul is implanted in a mortal body; so perhaps being controlled by them<sup>6</sup> could count as one of those inevitable circumstances where one ceases to be an agent and becomes instead a patient of external forces (whereby one’s passions could be seen as external to the real self, namely one’s reason, perhaps in line with *Timaeus* 90a). And, given that *akrasia* pertains to the domain where one is an agent (recall here Davidson’s description: it is a prerequisite for an agent to act incontinently in doing x that he should do x intentionally),<sup>7</sup> one could say that the *Timaeus* precludes the possibility of *akrasia* simply in the sense that it precludes one from *choosing* to be ruled by one’s passions. But this picture will not take us very far, for *Timaeus* does seem to think that we should have an active role in shaping our passions (and that we should choose to escape evil even when the best conditions are not given to us, *Tim.* 87b8, cf. *Rep.* 618e), as opposed to being mere victims of them in the sense that a drug addict might be thought a victim of his addiction.<sup>8</sup> It even communicates very strongly the message that we should have an active role in shaping necessity. Let us look at this more closely.

<sup>6</sup> As countenanced at *Tim.* 70b–c, 90b, 91c.

<sup>7</sup> Davidson (1980), 21–22.

<sup>8</sup> Compare here Santas’ description (1966).

The very notion of ‘necessity’ is in this respect relevant, since, as we saw, the lower parts of one’s soul are presented as a necessary result of the fact that we have a mortal body (42a–b, 69c–d; along similar lines the needs of the appetitive part of the soul for food, drink and the like are remitted to the nature of the body, 70d). ‘Necessity’ is not only that in principle recalcitrant element that preexists god’s activity and, to some extent, imposes limitations on it (e.g. the demiurge cannot change the tendency of what is watery to humidify, cf. 52d), but also the element that he succeeds in ‘persuading’ for the most part, thus turning it into a cooperator for his purposes so as to create a beautiful universe (48a). In this light, necessity can mean not just something inevitable, but something instrumentally necessary for the attainment of a goal.<sup>9</sup> The same could be said of the lower parts of the soul: while the desire for food may, if overindulged, hinder rational activity (a situation that the *Timaeus* describes as ‘becoming mortal’, 90b), it can, at the same time, conversely be used to facilitate it. For such a desire is natural (cf. 88b1–2), and not only helps fulfil a physiological need (70d7–8) but also has the teleological role in the universe of helping cultivate the appropriate balance between body and soul without which virtue is impossible (87c–d). Similarly, the irascible element of our personality, *thumos*, which is a ‘lover of victory’ (*philonikos*, 70a3), can and should be used as an ally of reason in securing appropriate self-control in the soul and for the sake of participating in bravery and fighting injustice (cf. 70a–d). And more generally the body, which could act as a potential source of disorder, is, instead, meant to have for us precisely the role of an instrument or vehicle (*ochêma*) for reason (41e, 44d–e, 69c).

Thus, even when the individual is the subject of passions and emotions that have a source different from his reason, his goal would in any case be to use his subrational faculties in such a way that he too is free from false judgement and irrationality in the undesirable sense of the word, as conflicting with reason. The lower parts of the soul can still however be called irrational insofar as they, unlike reason, lack the capacity to deliberate about what is good for the overall person (70e–71a, cf. *Rep.* IV 442c). At the same time, they can be said to have a ‘rational’ place in the universe insofar as they are part of a wider teleological plan, to which the virtuous person must make them

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<sup>9</sup> See here my (2005b), ch. 2.

conform.<sup>10</sup> But then, even within a tripartite psychological picture, it would be possible to talk of the ‘teleology’ of desire in the *Timaeus*, at least in the sense that (whether self-reflexively or not) desire exists (or can be made to exist) for some good.<sup>11</sup> It is even suggested that there is some benefit for all parts of the soul, including appetite, as it is the function of reason to deliberate about the good *for each individual part* and all parts in common (71a1–2). Likewise in the *Republic*, we are told that there is a good for each part of the soul (IV 442c7) and, as I have also argued, that each part of the soul has evaluative opinions that, through the effect of virtue, should be made to agree with those of reason (cf. *homodoxôsi dein archein* at IV 442d1).<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that, just as in the *Republic* justice in the individual is ultimately defined as a condition of internal order and harmony between all parts of the soul (443c–444a), so does the *Timaeus* describe injustice as not only external but also internal, when talking of the way the heart is supposed to help *thumos* and reason to deal with the threat of injustice not only from without but also ‘from the appetites within’ (70b5) and guarantee the ‘obedience and following of reason in every way’ that will allow the best part to rule (70b8–c1). This also shows that *thumos* can have evaluative beliefs (about justice, cf. 70b3–5; and presumably also about ‘terrible things’ that it fears at 70c2).<sup>13</sup>

It would seem, then, that a life of virtue will include giving the passions their appropriate place and allowing them to perform the role for which they are meant in the person as part of a teleological universe. As a consequence, the *Timaeus* does not advocate the elimination or suppression of the lower parts of one’s soul, but rather, the proportionate interaction between all parts (90a1–2). Relatedly, it allows for the possibility of appetite being ‘persuaded voluntarily’ by the order and discourse (*logôî*) coming from the commanding part (thus suggesting that appetite can understand *logos*) and of *thumos* ‘listening’ to reason

<sup>10</sup> See my (2005b), ch. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. here the description of *erôs* in the *Symposium* as pursuing some good (204d–e). Desire in the *Timaeus* is attributed not only to the lowest part of the soul but also to *thumos*, which is *philonikos* as we have seen at 70a3. For another attempt to explore the role of desire in the *Timaeus*’ teleological universe compare Johansen (2004), 149–159.

<sup>12</sup> See my (2001).

<sup>13</sup> We are not told much in terms of whether the *epithumêtikon* can have or has evaluative beliefs (unless one takes the possibility of ‘being persuaded by the order’ of reason to imply understanding of what is worth going for and not at 70a), but at least this, as I shall argue, is not precluded by the text. See also below.

(70a5–7)—just as Reason persuades necessity on the macrocosmic scale.<sup>14</sup>

But how seriously should one take this talk of persuasion with regard to the lower parts of the soul?<sup>15</sup> One could argue here that, if they are so structured that they are incapable of understanding reason, talk of persuasion would be futile. All we would be left with is suppression or the use of force. Along these lines, it has appeared to some interpreters that the *Timaeus* presents a tension in its moral psychology by, on the one hand, talking of *thumos* and the appetites in terms of obedience and persuasion and, on the other, presenting a picture by which it would be more appropriate to use force, not persuasion, on them.<sup>16</sup> After all, the *Timaeus* allows the possibility of using *bia* on the appetites (70a5–6). But this comes with an important qualification: *thumos* would do so whenever (*hopote*) the appetites would not willingly want to be persuaded by reason (*logôi mêdamêi peitheastai hekon etheloi*, 70a6–7).<sup>17</sup>

Another argument one may invoke to downplay talk of the lower parts of the soul in terms of persuasion and obedience is the fact that the *Timaeus* seems to attribute desires and beliefs to more things than we would expect it to, such as parts of the body itself: thus the penis has desires (91b), and the sentient parts of the body are capable of obedience and being persuaded (70b).<sup>18</sup> Yet the *Timaeus* does have resources to account for that seemingly strange phenomenon, if, as I have argued elsewhere, it presents a view of psychosomatic interdependence that is far removed from standard forms of dualism,<sup>19</sup> and if the soul is conceived as pretty much diffused throughout the body. This would enable us to understand why the passions are now regarded as localised within the body itself. Certainly, one could argue that in the *Timaeus* one may not expect Plato to speak of the body as the *locus* of passions and emotions beyond the fact that the three parts of the soul seem to be housed in distinct parts of the human anatomy (69e–70a, 70d–e,

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 47e–48a; necessity is also described as ‘voluntarily’ (*hekousa*) persuaded by *nous* at 56c.

<sup>15</sup> After all, it is not clear that one should take ‘persuasion’ at a cosmic level literally; even though, admittedly, it is far from evident that ‘necessity’ should, in a precosmic state, be endowed with soul at all (interpretations such as Plutarch’s in this respect are the exception: cf. *De an. proc.* 1014d–1015 f.), unlike the case we are discussing.

<sup>16</sup> See Kahn (2004), 358, commenting on Bobonich (2002), 316–320.

<sup>17</sup> Pace Walsh (1963), 39–40, who regards the role of *thumos* as fundamentally repressive.

<sup>18</sup> See here Bobonich (2002), 297.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. my (2005c).

73c–d). But, even though Plato does localise the different parts of the soul in different regions of the human body, he presents the marrow as being the link between all the parts (since god ‘planted in it the species of soul and tied them down’, 73c3–4, and from it extended bonds for the whole soul, 73d) and describes the bones that surround it as more animate or less animate, depending on the amount of soul contained in their marrow (74e–75a). This shows that the soul, in its various forms, is spread throughout the body,<sup>20</sup> including legs, hips, arms and so on (74e10–75a3); just as the world-soul is said to be spread over the whole of the world-body (36e).<sup>21</sup> But if so, it is no surprise that parts of the body itself should be attributed desires and beliefs. So the fact that the penis is attributed *epithumia* (91b3, 7) makes perfect sense ‘inasmuch as the marrow is animate’, as that passage explains (91b2),<sup>22</sup> and the same can be said of the presentation of the body as *locus* of obedience and propositional understanding: we are told that the heart was established in the guard’s dwelling so that, when reason announces to the rest that an injustice has been done, then ‘sharply through all the channels, everything that is perceptive in the body, perceiving the exhortations and threats, would become obedient and would follow in every way and thus allow the best part to rule in all these cases’ (70b5–c1). It is here interesting that whatever is *aisthêtikón* is said both to be *en tōi sōmati* and to be able to listen to the exhortations of reason. If bodily parts have soul, then they can respond in terms of understanding and obedience, just as if the sexual organs are ensouled, then Plato can quite literally talk about them as having desire, as he does the lower parts of the soul. At any rate, the view that it is the organism, rather than the soul in isolation, that is the subject of desires, beliefs etc. is backed up by occasional talk in other late dialogues about the human being as an ‘ensouled body’ (*empsychou sōματος*, *Philebus* 64b7—rather than as an ‘embodied soul’) and the presentation of the soul e.g. in the *Laws*

<sup>20</sup> We can think of it by analogy to the central nervous system in modern physiology, which is both localised (in the spinal cord) but with nerve endings distributed all over the body.

<sup>21</sup> This is not a late period innovation. Whatever one thinks of the mind-body relation in the *Phaedo*, recall here the recommendation that the philosopher should collect his soul ‘from all the points of the body’ (67c; cf. 83a).

<sup>22</sup> This would also explain why, in the words of Bobonich (2002), 297, ‘the womb... is capable of anger in addition to its desire for child-bearing’ (*Tim.* 91b3–c4), despite his attempt to read these passages in a deflationary way.

as (*qua* self-motion) a ‘property’ (*pathos*) of a body (895c).<sup>23</sup> And here in the *Timaeus* (37b), the world-soul is said to carry its *logoi* ‘in that which is moved by itself’, presumably, the animated universe.<sup>24</sup>

Yet this view of the *Timaeus* might seem too optimistic. If the *Republic* is seen by many to depart from the *Protagoras* precisely because it occasionally compares the lowest part of the soul to a beast (IV 439b, IX 588e–589b), as if suggesting brute irrationality, despite its also describing such a part as being capable of forming evaluative beliefs (IV 442d), the *Timaeus* seems to have gone further than the *Republic* in its pessimism about the human capacities, one might argue, by not only describing (as in the *Republic*) the lowest part of the soul in beast-like terms (70e) but, in addition, suggesting that it is indeed unable to participate in any *doxa* whatsoever, and therefore in any judgements concerning its good:

All that participates in living one would most rightly say in justice is a living creature. What we are now speaking of [= plants] does at any rate partake of the third kind of soul which we said is located between the chest and the navel. It<sup>25</sup> does not participate at all in *doxa*, *logismos* and *nous*, but in pleasure and painful sensation together with desires.

<sup>23</sup> Just as in the *Philebus* the universe itself is said somehow (*pou*) to be a body (29e1–2), even when it possesses soul. I have argued for this at greater length in my (2005b), chs. 2, 4, 8.

<sup>24</sup> See Cornford (1937), 95, n. 2.

<sup>25</sup> There is a question about the grammatical structure of the passage here translated: what is it that does not participate in *doxa*, *logismos* or *nous*? Is it (I) ‘the third kind of soul’ (located between the midriff and the neck in the case of humans) or (II) plants (i.e. ‘what we are now speaking of’ at b3)? The Greek is ambiguous, as *hōi* at b5 (what I have translated as ‘it’) could refer to either. A common interpretation has been to take it (together with the *hō* at b4) as referring to the ‘third kind of soul’, which would then be deprived of *doxa* etc. (See e.g. Bury (1951), *ad loc.*; Brisson (1992), *ad loc.*; Zeyl (2000), *ad loc.*; Bobonich (2002), 319). On the other hand, the explanation that follows—preceded by a *gar*—seems more applicable to plants than to the lowest part of humans (as the lowest part of humans does participate in exercise and is not recommended to rest, as we shall see shortly) and so there is reason at least to doubt that the passage should be taken as suggesting in a clear-cut way that the lowest human soul part does not participate in *doxa*. In fact, if we follow interpretation (II), it would make perfect sense for Plato to use the word *metechein* at b3: for plants would be *participating in* (or having a share of) certain features of the lowest human psychic part without their soul being identical to it. In that case, the lowest part of the human soul could still participate in certain functions (or at least that would *not* be excluded in this passage), but the point here would be that plants only share in some (though not all) of those functions. In what follows I will not rely on interpretation (II), as my remarks can equally apply to either reading; but the reader should bear in mind that the Greek at any rate is *not* as committal as interpreters have usually taken it.

For it continually undergoes all of those things, and it doesn't turn itself on itself about itself, pushing away one motion from without and using another as its own. Its birth did not allow it by nature to discern and reckon any of its own affections; therefore in being alive it is no different from a living creature, but rooted fast it is stuck because it is deprived of self-motion. (77b1–c5)<sup>26</sup>

How can the lowest part of the soul be persuaded by reason (which does suggest some understanding, as implied by *Tim.* 70a), if it participates in no *doxa* at all, as apparently suggested by *Tim.* 77b? If the lowest part of the soul is altogether being denied judgemental attitudes, it would seem that talk of its agreeing to follow reason becomes nonsensical. Is psychic conflict then inevitable, so that antagonism will persist even when reason, aided by *thumos*, retains, so to speak, the 'upper hand'? We must remember again that force (*bia*) is only to be used whenever the lowest part fails to *voluntarily follow* reason, which suggests that the lowest part is capable of doing so, at least in humans. By contrast one would not expect the soul of the plant to have that capacity, however similar (or akin, *sungenês*, cf. 77a4) it may be to the lowest human soul part in other respects. True, a little earlier, at 71a, we are told that the appetitive part does not understand *logos*, but here *logos* has the specific sense of what looks after the interests of (or what is better for, *sumpherontos*) all parts in common (cf. 70e5–71a3), the function typical of *phronêsis* or wisdom (cf. 71d4). The claim therefore should not be taken beyond this qualification,<sup>27</sup> as it is precisely the role of reason, by contrast with the other parts, to deliberate about the common good (71a1)—and after all, it is granted that, even if the appetitive part does have some 'awareness' (*aisthêsis*, 71a4) of *logos*, its natural tendency would be not to pay heed to it: that is, even if endowed with awareness, the appetitive part will not 'see' beyond its own self-interest (and that is

<sup>26</sup> Πάν γάρ οὖν ὅτι περ ἂν μετάσχη τοῦ ζῆν, ζῶν μὲν ἂν ἐν δίκῃ λέγοιτο ὀρθότατα· μετέχει γὰρ μὴν τοῦτο ὃ νῦν λέγομεν τοῦ τρίτου ψυχῆς εἶδους, ὃ μεταξύ φρενῶν ὀφθαλμοῦ τε ἰδρῶσθαι λόγος, ᾧ δόξης μὲν λογισμοῦ τε καὶ νοῦ μέτεστιν τὸ μηδὲν, αἰσθήσεως δὲ ἡδεΐας καὶ ἀλγεινῆς μετὰ ἐπιθυμιῶν. πάσχον γὰρ διατελεῖ πάντα, στραφέντι δ' αὐτῷ ἐν ἑαυτῷ περὶ ἑαυτό, τὴν μὲν ἔξωθεν ἀπωσαμένῳ κίνησιν, τῇ δ' οἰκείᾳ χρησαμένῳ, τῶν αὐτοῦ τι λογισασθαι κατιδόντι φύσει οὐ παραδέδωκεν ἡ γένεσις. διὸ δὴ ζῆ μὲν ἔστιν τε οὐχ ἕτερον ζῶον, μόνιμον δὲ καὶ κατερριζωμένον πέπηγεν διὰ τὸ τῆς ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ κινήσεως ἐστερηῆσθαι.

<sup>27</sup> Pace Bobonich (2002), 316–317, who would like to infer, from the mere fact that *logos* is being denied in this passage, a loaded theory about the *epithumêtikon* lacking, unlike the *Republic*, conceptual content and being incapable of means-end reasoning; a theory that finds little foundation in the actual text of the *Timaeus* that we are considering.



why, for example, in the *Republic* the way reason succeeds in persuading it is by making it see that it is in its own best interest to have reason rule, cf. IX 586d–e).

Likewise, one should not be particularly moved by the comparison of the lowest part with a beast, if after all beasts are said to have reason except that they don't use it properly (91e2–92a2). So one cannot use this comparison to decide the issue against the lowest part sharing in some doxastic structure or rational understanding.<sup>28</sup> And that *thumos* does share in doxastic structure is confirmed by *Tim.* 70b–c, where it is described as experiencing fear and anger, in a context where fear is alluded to as the 'expectation of terrible things' (*tôn deinôn prosdokia*, 70c2), as well as by the talk of reason 'announcing' information about injustice to *thumos* at 70b. In addition, the lowest part of the soul is presented as liable to be led or won over (cf. *psuchagôgêsoito*, 71a6–7)<sup>29</sup> by appearances (*phantasmata*), which seems to suggest that it is capable at least of pictorial representations and presumably even of *phantasia* (a faculty featured in other late dialogues as presupposing *doxa*, cf. *Soph.* 264a–b, *Phil.* 39b–c), which must have a content about good and evil that divination sets out to decipher (71e–72a).

Certainly, this issue is not uncontroversial, as one might still be tempted to take the plants passage at *Tim.* 77b at face value and minimize instead all the other evidence that seemed to support the belief in the lowest parts of the soul sharing in judgemental attitudes. In such a case, one might still wonder how to explain this circumstance in the face of what seem to be the doxastic functions of the lowest part of the soul in the *Republic*.<sup>30</sup> One answer would be to minimize such talk of doxastic functions in the *Republic* too (as is done by Kahn).<sup>31</sup> Another would be to invoke a gradual change of mind on the part of Plato (as is done by Bobonich).<sup>32</sup> One might also argue that in the *Timaeus*

<sup>28</sup> As seems suggested by Kahn (2004), 356; compare also Brisson (1974), 419. On reason in animals see Sorabji (1993), 10.

<sup>29</sup> In fact, in the *Phaedrus* (271c10) *psuchagôgia* is the positive function that Plato finds for rhetoric, whose effect on the soul is precisely persuasion; so we have reason to doubt that Plato is using this term merely pejoratively in the *Timaeus* (pace Taylor (1928), 510). On the 'persuadable' character of our appetitive desires in the *Gorgias* and *Republic* see my (2004), 78–79 and 83–84.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. e.g. *Rep.* IV 442d1, IX 574d–e, X 602e–603d, 605b–c.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Kahn (2004), 354: 'Like the horses, the non-rational parts of the soul in the *Republic* have beliefs only in the Humean sense of animal belief, as implied by behaviour, not in the classical sense of *doxa* as opinion or judgement'.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Bobonich (2002), 316–326. According to Bobonich (who, with the majority,

the cognitive function of *doxa* has been upgraded by comparison with the *Republic*, so that Plato is not talking about the same faculty when attributing *doxa* to the lowest part in the *Republic* and putatively denying it in the *Timaeus*.<sup>33</sup> However, even if one does not rule out such a view, another (perhaps more fertile) interpretation seems available, and it relates to the strong psycho-somatic interdependence that one can find in this dialogue. According to this view of the mind-body relation, one may say that the comparison of the lowest part of the soul with the soul of plants is not meant to imply a point for point equivalence between the two capacities, given that plants share in bodily organs which are different from the organs of a human body, and the existence of certain organs significantly conditions, or determines, the existence of certain capacities. Take here the example of the liver in the case of humans: we are told that god framed the shape of the liver so that the power of thought that comes from *nous* could produce impressions and images in the liver and thus either frighten or calm down the appetitive part of the soul (which is particularly responsive to images and appearances, *eidôlôn kai phantasmátôn*, 71a5–6), allowing it to participate in divination during sleep so that it would ‘somehow get in touch with truth’ (*alêtheias pēi prosaptoito*, 71e1).<sup>34</sup>

Just as it would make no sense to attribute to the soul of a plant the capacity to ‘be willingly persuaded’ by reason (simply because such a soul is not part of an organism which possesses faculties such as reason), it would be absurd to say that a plant can come to be ‘in contact with truth’, as the lowest part of the human soul is said to be in the *Timaeus*, and this is so because different bodily conditions (such as the existence of the liver) are bound to promote different psychic capacities. Likewise, different capacities seem to require specific bodily conditions: in the case of *thumos*, for example, we are told that it could not fulfil its role as a helper of reason (to which it can ‘listen’) without the aid of the

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takes the plants passage at 77b as denying that the lowest part of the soul shares in *doxa*), the *epithumêtikon* is incapable of conceptualization, which must thus belong to reason alone, unlike the tripartite scheme in the *Republic* where each part had contentful desires that can oppose reason.

<sup>33</sup> Especially if one takes it that in the *Republic* perception already presupposes *doxa* (see e.g. Burnyeat (1999), 228), while in his late period (e.g. *Sophist* 264a–b and *Philebus* 38b–c) *doxa* involves more than perception.

<sup>34</sup> For a positive appraisal of the way dreams can communicate truth in the *Timaeus*, compare the analysis of Rotandaro (1997), 275–80.

lung and the heart (70a–d). Certainly, plants do have some organs (at least generically) in common with humans when it comes e.g. to their reproductive functions, which are said to be tied up with epithumetic capacities (91b–d); but this does not rule out that other organs may be needed when the *epithumêtikon* forms part of more complex organisms in a way that makes the very structure of the *epithumêtikon* itself more complex. Take another example: in the plants passage we are told that their soul doesn't 'turn itself on itself about itself, pushing away one motion from without and using another as its own' (77b7–c1) but is instead stationary (*monimon*, c3); and yet later on, when recommending the proper care of mind and body (87c1–2) we are told that all parts (*merê*, 88c7) must be moved in imitation of the universe instead of being kept at rest (*hêsuchia*, 88d); the best motion being that which is 'in itself by itself' (as it is most akin to that of the universe, 89a). In this manner even the lower parts of the soul, which have each their own motion, are recommended not to stay at rest (which would weaken them) but to be kept in exercise (cf. *en gymnasiois*, 89e8) in such a way that there is proportion between all parts (89e–90a); clearly, this recommendation of exercise, which makes sense in more complex creatures such as humans, could not be translated to the soul of plants.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the two passages, when put together, seem to suggest that, *unlike* the optimal state of the lowest human soul part, the soul of plants is at rest, which shows that one should be cautious about taking the soul of plants and the human soul's appetitive part as simply equivalent. By the same token, the existence of *thumos* and appetite side by side with the existence of reason in an individual should not be taken as aggregational, since the whole resulting from their composition is more than the mere sum of the parts; in fact each part is even redefined and restructured in relation to their function in the whole (hence the recommendation that the optimal motion for the lowest part should be proportionate with all the others, 90a1–2), and thus turns out to be quite different than it would be if forming part of different wholes or taken in isolation. Finally, even though both plants and the *epithumêtikon* are said to share in *aisthêsis* and affections, it seems impossible to attribute to plants, unlike humans, sensible affections characterised as having the quality

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<sup>35</sup> Pace Bobonich (2002), 319 and 545, n. 112, who infers from the plants passage that the lowest part of the human soul is 'wholly passive'.

of reaching intellect (*to phronimon*) and announcing (cf. *exangeilēi*) the property of that which caused them (64b), simply because *to phronimon* is lacking in plants. Thus, I suggest that one should take the claim at 77a–c as meaning that the soul of plants is simply akin to (cf. *sungenēs*, 77a4), or of the same general type as, the appetitive part of the human soul, which does not indicate that it is identical in structure.

The rewards of such a view are apparent, for it eliminates putative tensions in the text and gives us no reason to explain away talk of beliefs with regard to the lower parts of the soul. It also enables us to explain why Plato should think that harmony between all parts of the soul is possible: after all, it is the proportionate movements between all parts that is recommended (90a1–2). It also makes the passions capable of participating in judgemental attitudes (and arguably, even evaluative attitudes) similar to tendencies that we find both in the *Philebus* and the *Laws* (two dialogues where Plato resumes the Socratic denial of voluntary wrong-doing),<sup>36</sup> if we take into account, for example, the claim in *Laws* II that fear is an expectation of evils (644c9–d1, 646e7–8), the characterization of pleasure in the *Laws* in terms of the belief that we are doing well (II 657c5–6),<sup>37</sup> and the possibility (both in the *Philebus* and the *Laws*) that one may have false pleasures understood as involving propositional attitudes and therefore beliefs of some sort.<sup>38</sup>

Certainly, allowing that the passions may have propositional structure, listen to and understand reason, is not yet in itself the concession that *akrasia* is impossible. For the passions could have such a structure and still prevail in the soul at the expense of reason's all things considered judgement at the moment of action. But at least seeing that the passions have propositional structure, and even a rational place in the universe, offers a way of maximizing the self-consistency of the *Timaeus* given its denial that anyone would do wrong voluntarily (at 86d–e), as would instead be the case if, at the moment of action, one sees via reason that a better course is available and yet chooses to pursue a less good one. If (1) the passions were brutally irrational and yet (2) preserved their power of motivating someone to intentional action at the same time as reason, however strong, deems a different course of action to be better

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Phil.* 22b, *Laws* V 731c.

<sup>37</sup> See here Gosling and Taylor (1982), 172.

<sup>38</sup> On the *Laws*, see my (2003), 292 ff.; on the *Philebus*, see my (2000), with references to other literature therein.

(and possible), Plato could not maintain in the *Timaeus* the view that no one ever does wrong voluntarily. For he could not imply that the person would not do wrong if she knew better or could avoid it (as he does at 86e1–2). He could not even maintain the view of virtue as involving friendliness and balance between body and soul (87d, 88b–c; for which the universe is a paradigm, 34b) or sensibly recommend the exercise in relative proportion of all parts of the soul (90a1–2), because there would be no guarantee that the passions would be sufficiently domesticated to follow reason if after all they preserve their recalcitrant nature which could thus at any point motivate someone (as in cases of repression of bad emotions, which is very different from their uprooting).<sup>39</sup> Instead, because it is the case that in the *Timaeus* the passions, notwithstanding their bodily origin, have some sort of rational structure, can listen to reason and be persuaded (not simply forced) by it, inner harmony and virtue is possible, and the rule of *nous* can enjoy stability. Conversely, the *Timaeus* describes situations in which the rule of *nous* is absent not as cases where *nous* is fully developed and yet powerless in the face of stronger emotions, but as cases where *nous* is underdeveloped or lacking altogether in the person: thus, as we have seen, the one who is dominated by his passions and misses the right education returns to Hades *atelês* and *anoêtos* (just as the infant soul also dominated by the passions is called *anoêtos*); and we are told that it is either exercise or the lack of exercise that makes reason strong or weak in relation to the other faculties (89e–90a). By contrast, a salient feature of *nous* as distinct from mere *doxa* is described as its being unmoved by persuasion (51e); unlike *doxa* as such, which can be moved by it.<sup>40</sup> If, as we saw in the *Timaeus*, the lower parts of the soul are said somehow to share in *doxa* (and are thus persuadable in many different ways), this means that reason, in its full sense and when totally developed in the person, retains, thanks to its stability, the upper hand over the passions and will not waver in the face of them, just as knowledge was said to do in the *Protagoras*. Rather, reason, when fully developed in the person, will

<sup>39</sup> On the issue of repression in the *Republic* cf. my (2005a).

<sup>40</sup> At *Tim.* 51d–e *nous* is presented as the cognitive correlate of the Forms. But *nous* was also described as having the practical function of ruling (and ‘persuading’) necessity (48a). Presumably, Plato is maintaining the view that knowledge of the Forms will necessarily result in right action (hence the Demiurge, which we can take as an exemplar of the virtuous agent, not only looks to a stable paradigm but also creates the best possible result: 29a, 30a). For a similar view maintained in the *Republic* see my (2001).

persuade the passions to follow its lead, by which they will be following their own good, which needn't conflict with the good of the whole (cf. 71a)<sup>41</sup>—and this is the sense in which the *Timaeus* commends a life 'according to reason' (89d4).

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<sup>41</sup> If, say, the good for the *epithumêtikon* is the satisfaction of desire, then this good must agree with the good of the whole soul to the extent that a life of virtue cannot be led without the fulfilment of bodily needs. And if, say, the good of *thumos* is victory, such a good must agree with the good of the whole soul to the extent that victory must be deemed to be just according to the principles of reason. Cf. also *Laws* 903c–d for the statement that the part exists for the sake of the whole and not vice versa, the good of the whole being also good for the part; and my (2005b), ch. 8 and 9.

## PLATO AND ENKRATEIA\*

LOUIS-ANDRÉ DORION

In the second volume of *Paideia*,<sup>1</sup> W. Jaeger rightly observes that the term *enkrateia* appears for the first time in the works of Plato and Xenophon. The adjective *enkratês* was already in use, but it served not to express the mastery one exercises on oneself, but rather the control or power one exerts on things or other people.<sup>2</sup> Since the first occurrences of the term *enkrateia* are found in Plato and Xenophon, and the adjective *enkratês* is never used, before them, in the sense of ‘master of oneself’ with regard to corporeal pleasures, Jaeger’s hypothesis, which attributes the creation of the term *enkrateia* to Socrates, seems plausible at first glance. However, it escaped Jaeger’s notice that there is a considerable difference between Plato and Xenophon as far as the frequency with which they use this term is concerned. Whereas Xenophon is quite happy to have recourse to it in the *Memorabilia*, to the point that he devotes three entire chapters to *enkrateia* (I 5; II 1; IV 5), Plato never uses the term *enkrateia* in his early dialogues.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Plato, then, we seem to be up against a formidable paradox: whereas the very term *enkrateia* is supposed to be of Socratic inspiration, it never appears in his dialogues considered to be ‘Socratic’! Since I consider the ‘Socratic question’ to be a problem that is unsolvable and badly formulated,<sup>4</sup> I will not try to demonstrate that Xenophon’s Socrates is, as far as *enkrateia* is concerned, more faithful to the historical Socrates than Plato’s Socrates. Instead, I will attempt to determine the reasons why Plato, on the one hand, attributes no importance to *enkrateia* in his early dialogues and, on the other hand, partially rehabilitates this notion in his middle and late dialogues. The interest of this research consists in determining the

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\* I would like to thank Michael Chase for translating my text.

<sup>1</sup> Jaeger (1943), 54.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Herodotus VIII 49; IX 106; Thucydides I 76, 1; I 118, 2; VI 92, 2. Cf. also *infra*, n. 22.

<sup>3</sup> As Vlastos (1983), 503, n. 15 = (1994), 97, n. 20, has rightly pointed out. If one considers only the *Memorabilia*, there are twenty-one occurrences of terms related to *enkrateia*, whereas the same number is found in the entire *Corpus platonicum*. Of this total, only nine are relevant (cf. *infra*, n. 58).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dorion (2000), xcix–cxviii, and Dorion (forthcoming).

sense in which Plato's position approximates or is distinguished from that of other Socratics, in particular Xenophon, who accorded an essential role to *enkrateia* in order to check *akrasia*.

### 1. *The reasons for an absence*

The interlocutors of the *Charmides* propose six different definitions of *sôphrosunê*: rather curiously, none of these definitions refers to *sôphrosunê* understood as *enkrateia*, that is, as self-mastery with regard to corporeal pleasures and desires. This absence is remarkable, not only because this is a common and widespread conception of *sôphrosunê*, which would therefore be worthy of discussion, and because Socrates was precisely reputed, according to Xenophon's testimony, to be a model of *enkrateia*,<sup>5</sup> but also, and in particular, because Plato, in dialogues later than the *Charmides*, seems himself to subscribe to this conception of *sôphrosunê*.<sup>6</sup> The question obviously arises of the reason why Plato chose to bypass this conception of *sôphrosunê*, which was widespread. The very fact that other Socratics, particularly Xenophon and the Cynics, accorded a prominent role to *enkrateia*, to the extent, in Xenophon's case, of making it 'the foundation of virtue' (*Mem.* I 5, 4), makes Plato's silence regarding this meaning of *sôphrosunê* even more mysterious, if not incomprehensible. After all, this is not a case of a simple vulgar

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Mem.* I 2, 1; I 2, 14; I 3, 5–14; I 5, 1; I 6, 8; III 14; IV 5, 9; IV 8, 11; *Apol.* 16. It seems to me inexact to maintain, as does Goulet-Cazé (1986), 137 and 140, that Plato and Xenophon both present Socrates as a model of *enkrateia*. To be sure, Plato's Socrates is master of himself, but besides the fact that this is a characteristic on which Plato insists much less than Xenophon, his moderation does not derive from *enkrateia*—the absence of which in the 'Socratic' dialogues is not noted by Goulet-Cazé—, but rather from knowledge. The early dialogues contain only rare and furtive allusions to the self-mastery Socrates displays (cf. *Charmides* 155c–e, 156d and *Lysis* 222a), and it is above all in the *Symposium* (216d–220a, 220c–d) that Plato insists on this characteristic of Socrates, but without ever designating or expressing it by means of the term *enkrateia*. The fact that the *Symposium* is in all probability later than the *Gorgias* (cf. *infra*, section 2), confirms, in a way, that Plato was not interested in self-mastery in the early dialogues.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Gorg.* 491d, 507a–d; *Symp.* 196c; *Rep.* III 389d, 402e–403a, IV 430c, 431b, d, IX 573b; *Phaedrus* 237c; *Phil.* 12d, 45d; *Laws* I 647d, II 673c, III 696b–c, IV 710a, V 733c–734d, VII 814e, VIII 840a. Cf. also North (1966), 158: "In later dialogues, as Plato moves away from the Socratic position, he becomes increasingly interested in sophrosyne as the means of controlling the irrational in man, and in the last of his works, the *Laws*, this conception of sophrosyne is completely victorious".



meaning for which Plato had nothing but contempt, but a conception of which some Socratics made Socrates the herald.<sup>7</sup>

Many commentators have pointed out the absence of *sôphrosunê/enkrateia* in the *Charmides*, but few have taken the risk of explaining this absence. The rare attempts at explanation I know of are scarcely convincing. H. North, for instance, affirms that the reason for this absence 'is clearly that such a definition would not contribute to the purpose of the dialogue—the discussion of virtue as knowledge'.<sup>8</sup> While it is true that this definition does not do justice to the cognitive and intellectual dimension of *sôphrosunê*, why not refute it explicitly and also, at the same time, refute the Socratics who accord it a fundamental role in Socrates' ethics? Moreover, although the two definitions proposed by Charmides—calm (159b) and modesty (160e)—contribute nothing to the discussion of virtue as knowledge, Plato nevertheless set them forth and subjected them to refutation. Perhaps we must search within the very text of the *Charmides* for the reason why *enkrateia* is, in Plato's view, a conceptual aberration. While examining in the company of Critias the possibility that *sôphrosunê* may be a science of itself and of other sciences, Socrates brings to light the absurdity that derives from the fact that a thing can exert its *dunamis* upon itself: what is greater than itself will thereby also be smaller than itself, what is older than itself will also be younger than itself, etc. (168b–c). It is tempting to consider that it was because of this theoretical impossibility, set forth in the *Charmides*, that Plato refused the very notion of *enkrateia*. This hypothesis seems to me to be confirmed by a passage from *Republic IV* where *enkrateia* is described as a kind of superiority over oneself.

[Socrates] Is not 'master of oneself' an absurd expression? A man who was master of himself would presumably be also subject to himself, and the subject would be the master; for all these terms apply to the same person. (430e12–431a1, trans. Cornford)<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Xenophon's Socrates is a model not only of *enkrateia*, but also of *karteria*; that is, of endurance with regard to physical pain (cf. *Mem.* I 2, 1; I 6, 6–7). According to Chantraine (1968), 578–579, s.v. *κράτος*, the root *κράτος*, meaning 'strength', is present not only in the terms *ἐγκράτεια* and *καρτερία*, but also in Socrates' very name (*Σωκράτης*). Did the ancients already establish this connection between *ἐγκράτεια*, *καρτερία* and *Σωκράτης*? It is tempting to think so.

<sup>8</sup> North (1966), 158.

<sup>9</sup> Τὸ μὲν κρείττω αὐτοῦ γελοῖον· ὁ γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ κρείττων καὶ ἥττων δήπου ἂν αὐτοῦ εἴη καὶ ὁ ἥττων κρείττων· ὁ αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐν ἅπασιν τοῦτοις προσαγορεύεται.

The ridiculous (*geloion*) character of the expression ‘to be stronger than oneself’ (*kreittō hautou*) consists in the fact that it is subject to the same analysis as the one set forth in the *Charmides* with regard to relative terms like ‘bigger than oneself’, ‘heavier than oneself’, and ‘older than oneself’. It would thus be a mistake not to take seriously the reasons why Socrates is not inclined to admit that a relative term, that most often appears in the form of a comparative, could bear reflexively upon itself. It is precisely for this reason that Plato finds ridiculous, at least at first glance, the very notion of ‘self-mastery’ and superiority over oneself. However, Plato was eventually to become reconciled with these expressions and what they designate, but the conditions necessary for this reconciliation and rehabilitation do not seem to have been united before the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*.<sup>10</sup>

Plato’s great suspicion with regard to *enkrateia* also seems to be confirmed by a passage from the *Phaedo* where Socrates deals with the common conception of *sôphrosunê*; that is, moderation of desires (68c). Socrates makes fun of those who conceive *sôphrosunê* as a kind of trade or exchange that consists in abstaining from certain pleasures in the hope of enjoying greater pleasures.

What of the moderate among them? Is their experience not similar? Is it license of a kind that makes them moderate? We say this is impossible, yet their experience of this unsophisticated moderation turns out to be similar: they fear to be deprived of other pleasures which they desire, so they keep away from some pleasures because they are overcome by others. Now to be mastered by pleasure is what they call license, but what happens to them is that they master certain pleasures because they are mastered by others. This is like what we mentioned just now, that in some way it is a kind of license that has made them moderate. (68e2–69a4, trans. Grube)<sup>11</sup>

Socrates’ criticism consists in saying that this *sôphrosunê*, which he qualifies as *unsophisticated* (*euêthê*) is in fact a form of *license* (*akolasia*), since the ‘reason’ why one dominates certain pleasures is that one considers such

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *infra*, section 2.

<sup>11</sup> Τί δὲ οἱ κόσμιοι αὐτῶν; οὐ ταῦτὸν τοῦτο πεπόνθασιν· ἀκολασία τινὶ σώφρονές εἰσιν; καίτοι φαμέν γε ἀδύνατον εἶναι, ἀλλ’ ὅμως αὐτοῖς συμβαίνει τούτῳ ὅμοιον τὸ πάθος τὸ περὶ ταύτην τὴν εὐήθη σωφροσύνην· φοβούμενοι γὰρ ἐτέρων ἡδονῶν στερηθῆναι καὶ ἐπιθυμοῦντες ἐκείνων, ἄλλων ἀπέχονται ὑπ’ ἄλλων κρατούμενοι. καίτοι καλοῦσιν γε ἀκολασίαν τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν ἡδονῶν ἄρχεσθαι, ἀλλ’ ὅμως συμβαίνει αὐτοῖς κρατουμένοις ὑπ’ ἡδονῶν κρατεῖν ἄλλων ἡδονῶν. τοῦτο δ’ ὅμοιον ἐστὶν ᾧ νυνδὴ ἐλέγετο, τῷ τρόπον τινὰ δι’ ἀκολασίαν αὐτοὺς σεσωφρονίσθαι.

privation as the only means of obtaining others. It is therefore because one is dominated by some pleasures that one dominates others.<sup>12</sup> It is tempting to consider that the position criticized here by Socrates is the very one that is defended and claimed by Xenophon's Socrates (henceforth Socrates<sup>X</sup>). Several reasons weigh in favor of such a connection: first, Socrates<sup>X</sup> several times sets forth a hedonistic calculus similar to the one mocked here by Plato's Socrates (henceforth Socrates<sup>P</sup>). Indeed, *enkrateia* with regard to immediate pleasures and momentary desires is not synonymous with renouncing pleasure, for the person who abstains from the (false) pleasures of the moment is in fact reserving to himself access to greater pleasures.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, in the passage immediately following 68e–69a, Socrates explains that *sôphrosunê* does not consist in exchanging (lesser) pleasures against other (greater) pleasures, but in making thought (*phronêsis*) the only standard of measure (69a). This position, resolutely intellectualist, may be read as a criticism of those who elevate *enkrateia*, rather than thought, to the status of foundation of virtue. As I have tried to show elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> *enkrateia* is the foundation of virtue in the sense that it is the condition for the acquisition of virtue. Yet *enkrateia*, whose status Xenophon never specifies otherwise, is never presented as a virtue nor as knowledge. Although it is the subject of three separate discourses (*Mem.* I 5; II 1; IV 5), *enkrateia* does not appear among the virtues defined by Socrates at III 9 and IV 6. If it were of the same nature as virtue, it would seem difficult to escape a vicious circle, since if *enkrateia* is indispensable for the acquisition of the knowledge underlying the virtues, while being a virtue itself, then whence comes the knowledge that is inseparable from *enkrateia*? Nor is *enkrateia* moral knowledge, so it cannot determine the finality that other branches of knowledge should pursue. Although *enkrateia* fulfills the same function as *sophia* in Plato—that of a condition or foundation of virtue—it does not consist in a knowledge of an architectonic kind, contrary to Platonic *sophia*. Insofar as it possesses knowledge of good and evil, *sophia* can and must fix, for each of the particular branches of knowledge subordinate to it,

<sup>12</sup> In a sense, we find here once again the same paradox as the one brought out in the *Charmides* and the *Republic*: the person who seems to be in a position of mastery is also, at the same time, in a state of subjection, the only difference being that it is not with regard to the same thing (= the 'self') that he dominates and is dominated.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Mem.* I 3, 15; I 6, 4–10; II 1, 19–20; IV 5, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Dorion (2003), 648–650 and 652.

the finality they must pursue in the interest of the city's good.<sup>15</sup> Insofar as its role is to restrain the various appetites whose satisfaction risks distracting us from more urgent tasks, *enkrateia* appears instead as that which enables other branches of knowledge to pursue their respective finality freely and without impediment, without having the goal they must pursue dictated by *enkrateia*. *Enkrateia* is what facilitates, for each branch of knowledge, the pursuit of their respective objectives, not knowledge with an architectonic vocation that dictates to subordinate branches of knowledge the goals they are to attain. Contrary to Platonic *sophia*, which determines the good and the bad for the totality of fields and branches of knowledge, *enkrateia* does not define what is good or bad, because it is not knowledge: it is what enables the pursuit of a good that is given beforehand, and most often contributes either to the finalities of the various techniques, or else to the values (health, strength, riches, glory, etc.) to which the majority of human beings adhere. In short, if *enkrateia* is not knowledge, although it is the foundation of virtue, it cannot itself determine what is good or bad, so that it runs the risk, by its very nature, of confusing virtue with a simple calculus of pleasures and pains.

Thirdly, it is not a matter of indifference that Socrates qualifies as a 'truly servile (*andrapodôdês*) virtue, which contains nothing healthy or true' (69b), that *sôphrosunê* that is separate from thought (69b) and consists in a kind of exchange of pleasures. The occurrence of the term *andrapodôdês* can be understood perfectly well in the light of the context: such a virtue is 'servile', insofar as its renunciation of some pleasures in fact proceeds from its *enslavement* to other pleasures. However, nothing prevents this occurrence from also containing a critical allusion to Socrates<sup>x</sup>, who often uses the vocabulary of slavery to designate the person who is at the mercy of his desires and pleasures.<sup>16</sup> For those who recognize the importance of *enkrateia*, like Socrates<sup>x</sup>, genuine freedom consists in dominating one's pleasures, while the worst slavery is to be subjected to them.<sup>17</sup> Since *enkrateia* is the foundation of virtue,

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Charmides* 174b–c; *Euthydemus* 288d–293a; Vlastos (1983), 507 = (1994), 102–103.

<sup>16</sup> To designate the person who is the 'slave' of pleasures, Xenophon always uses the term δοῦλος (cf. *Mem.* I 3, 11; I 5, 5; I 6, 8; IV 5, 5; *Oec.* I 22–23; *Apol.* 16); to designate the person who is a slave because of his ignorance, he instead uses the term ἀνδράποδον (cf. *Mem.* I 1, 16; IV 2, 22; 23; 31; 39).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Mem.* I 5, 5; IV 5, 2–6; *Oec.* I 17–23 and *Apol.* 16, where *enkrateia* appears as the condition of freedom.

and nothing prevents men reduced to slavery for political or economic reasons from nevertheless having access to *enkrateia* and so virtue, the worst slavery is that of the person dominated by his pleasures, even if this person were, in addition, the master of many slaves, since he has no access to virtue. The metaphor of the slave in Xenophon's Socratic writings is thus intimately interconnected with the essential role attributed to *enkrateia*. By affirming that *sôphrosunê* dissociated from thought is a 'servile' virtue, Plato thus reverses the terms of the slave metaphor, which is, moreover, completely absent from the dialogues preceding the *Republic*. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the slave is no less absurd, in a sense, than the expression 'to be stronger than oneself': the slave to himself is also *ipso facto* his own master! The absence of this metaphor is a sign of Plato's indifference towards *enkrateia*. We recall that in the *Protagoras* (352b–c), Socrates rejects without appeal the common view that attributes no power of command to knowledge, and sees in it a slave (*andrapodon*, 352c1) at the mercy of passion, pleasure, grief, love, and fear. The only dialogue related to the early works that appeals to the metaphor of the slave and develops the idea, dear to Socrates<sup>x</sup>, that one cannot be free nor claim to govern others if one does not govern beforehand one's own passions, is the *First Alcibiades* (122a).<sup>18</sup> Some will see in this singularity of the *Alcibiades* a supplementary reason for suspicion with regard to its authenticity.

Finally, the comparison of the respective conceptions that Plato and Xenophon have of the *basilikê tekhnê* seems to confirm Plato's indifference with regard to *enkrateia*. Whereas *enkrateia* is at the foundation of the *basilikê tekhnê* of the *Memorabilia*,<sup>19</sup> insofar as self-mastery is the condition for the government of others, the homonymous discipline of the *Euthydemus* (291b–292c) makes no reference to it at all, since it consists essentially in a knowledge (*sophia*) of a moral nature, and not, as in Xenophon, in an aptitude for governing based on self-mastery.

As a conclusion to this first part, I would hazard the following explanation to account for the absence of *enkrateia* in the early dialogues:

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<sup>18</sup> When Socrates explains to Alcibiades in what the education of future kings of Persia (121a–124b) consists, he specifies that children are confided to four 'royal pedagogues', each of whom incarnates one of the principal virtues (*sophia*, justice, moderation and courage). The wisest one teaches what concerns the king's 'trade' (122a), while the most moderate one (122a) teaches the royal child 'not to let himself be governed by any pleasure, so that he may become accustomed to being free, and a true king, first governing his intimate tendencies, rather than making himself their slave'.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Mem.* II 1, 17; IV 2, 11 and Dorion (2004).

this absence is the corollary of the thesis that there is no such thing as *akrasia*.<sup>20</sup> If we admit the possibility of *akrasia*, we recognize at the same time that knowledge is not a sufficient condition for ensuring virtuous behavior. If we maintain, like Socrates<sup>p</sup>, that knowledge is a necessary and sufficient condition for adopting virtuous behavior, we reject not only *akrasia*, but also *enkrateia*, inasmuch as it is a disposition distinct from virtue and knowledge, that is, insofar as it consists in a mastery of the passions that enables the agent to remain faithful to his resolution to act in conformity with his knowledge of the good and of virtue. In other words, *akrasia* and *enkrateia* seem to be interconnected and inseparable from one another, like two sides of the same position, which consists in maintaining that knowledge is not a sufficient condition for being virtuous and that one must, in addition to being virtuous, be able to control oneself. As long as Plato denied the possibility of *akrasia*, he therefore also rejected *enkrateia*. If knowledge suffices to make us virtuous, why do we need, in addition, to be masters of ourselves? For Plato, self-mastery is not different from knowledge, since it is *sophia* that makes one 'stronger than oneself'. In other words, self-mastery is a simple *effect* of knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Contrary to the opinion that is widespread among most human beings, knowledge is something that possesses a *strength* (*ischuron*, *Prot.* 352b4), as well as a power of guiding (*hégemonikon*, 352b4) and commanding (*archikon*, 352b4), so that it is superfluous to subjoin to it the domination exercised by *enkrateia*.

This interpretation of the reasons why Plato, at the time when he was composing the *Charmides*, judged *enkrateia* to be useless and even absurd, enables an explanation of why a definition of *sôphrosunê* in terms of 'self-mastery' or 'mastery of pleasures' cannot be maintained, but it does not account for the very absence of such a definition in the *Charmides*. In many respects, this absence remains a mystery.

## 2. *The reasons for a (partial) rehabilitation*

Prior to the *Republic*, we find no occurrences of the term *enkrateia*, and six occurrences of the adjective *enkratês*, only one of which features the

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Prot.* 352b–d.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Prot.* 358c: 'To give in to oneself is nothing other than ignorance, and to control oneself is nothing other than wisdom' (trans. Lombardo/Bell); see also 359d: 'not to be in control of oneself was found to be ignorance' (trans. Lombardo/Bell).

meaning of self-mastery with regard to pleasures (*Gorg.* 491d). The five other occurrences, in conformity with the ‘pre-Socratic’ usage of the term, designate the power or mastery one exercises over something other than oneself.<sup>22</sup> It is in the *Gorgias* that the ‘Socratic’ usage of the adjective *enkrateês* appears for the first time:

[Socrates] But tell me, my good fellow, once and for all, whom you mean by the better and the superior, and what they’re better and superior in.—[Callicles] But I’ve already said that I mean those who are intelligent in the affairs of the city, and brave, too. It’s fitting that they should be the ones who rule their cities, and what’s just is that they, as the rulers, should have a greater share than the others, the ruled.—But what of themselves, my friend?—What of *what*?—Ruling or being ruled?—What do you mean?—I mean each individual ruling himself. Or is there no need at all for him to rule himself, but only to rule others?—What do you mean, rule himself?—Nothing very subtle. Just what the many mean: being self-controlled and master of oneself (*enkrateês*), ruling the pleasures and appetites within oneself. (491c4–e1, trans. Zeyl)<sup>23</sup>

This important passage calls for several remarks: first, whereas the *Charmides* omits the concept that assimilates *sôphrosunê* to *enkrateia*, the *Gorgias* associates them closely together, to the point that one cannot see in what respect they differ from one another.

Secondly, Socrates’ position, which consists in assimilating self-government (*heautou archein*) with self-mastery (*enkrateês auton heautou*) with regard to pleasures, is not, whatever he might say, the opinion of most people. According to Irwin (1979, 190), ‘it is actually quite hard to find evidence of this view in pre-Platonic Greek’.<sup>24</sup> Unless I am wrong, no commentator seems to have noticed that for the Greeks, ‘self-government’

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Menexenus* 238d: ‘Yet in most respects the people have sovereign power in the city’; cf. also *Cratylus* 391c, 393d, 405c; *Symposium* 188a.

<sup>23</sup> Ἀλλ’, ὦγαθέ, εἰπὼν ἀπαλλάγηθι τίνας ποτὲ λέγεις τοὺς βελτίους τε καὶ κρείττους καὶ εἰς ὅτι.—ΚΑΛ. Ἀλλ’ εἵρηκά γε ἔγωγε τοὺς φρονίμους εἰς τὰ τῆς πόλεως πράγματα καὶ ἀνδρείους. τούτους γὰρ προσήκει τῶν πόλεων ἄρχειν, καὶ τὸ δίκαιον τοῦτ’ ἐστίν, πλεόν ἔχειν τούτους τῶν ἄλλων, τοὺς ἄρχοντας τῶν ἀρχομένων.—ΣΩ. Τί δέ; αὐτῶν, ὦ ἑταῖρε, τί; ἢ τι ἄρχοντας ἢ ἀρχομένους;—ΚΑΛ. Πῶς λέγεις;—ΣΩ. Ἐνα ἕκαστον λέγω αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα· ἢ τοῦτο μὲν οὐδὲν δεῖ, αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχειν, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων;—ΚΑΛ. Πῶς ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα λέγεις;—ΣΩ. Οὐδὲν ποικίλον ἄλλ’ ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοί, σώφρονα ὄντα καὶ ἐγκρατῆ αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ, τῶν ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν ἄρχοντα τῶν ἐν ἑαυτῷ.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. also Canto (1987), 336, n. 124: ‘In fact, what Plato presents as a common opinion does not seem to have been the subject of unanimity’. The ‘common’ conception mentioned by Socrates is present in the following texts: Democritus DK B 214; Antiphon DK B 58; Euripides, *Medea* 1078; Anonymous of Iamblichus, DK IV 1.

usually designates the state of an adolescent who is not placed under the authority of a pedagogue—or of what used to be called, not long ago, a ‘governess’—and who therefore has access to a kind of independence or autonomy:

[Socrates] But tell me one more thing. Do they [*scil.* Lysis’ parents] allow you to be in charge of your own life, or do they not trust you even that far?—[Lysis] Are you kidding?—Who is in charge of you, then?—My guardian here—He’s a slave, isn’t he?—What else? He’s ours, anyway.—Pretty strange, a free man directed by a slave. How does this guardian direct you; I mean, what does he do?—Mostly he takes me to school. (*Lysis* 208c, trans. Lombardo)<sup>25</sup>

When I was a young man I had the same ambition as many others: I thought of entering public life as soon as I came of age. (*Letter VII*, 324b8–c1, trans. Morrow)<sup>26</sup>

When Heracles was passing from boyhood to youth’s estate, wherein the young, now becoming their own masters, show whether they will approach life by the path of virtue or the path of vice, he went out into a quiet place, and sat pondering which road to take. (*Mem.* II 1, 21, trans. Marchant)<sup>27</sup>

When a boy ceases to be a child, and begins to be a lad, others release him from his moral tutor and his schoolmaster: he is then no longer under a ruler and is allowed to go his own way.<sup>28</sup> (*Lac.* III 1, trans. Marchant)

Yet Socrates considers that the simple fact of being emancipated from a pedagogue or from one’s parents does not suffice to ensure self-government, since one must in addition learn to control one’s desires. While it is true that it is hard to find examples of this use of the expression *heautou archein*, before Socrates, Jaeger may not have been wrong to attribute to him the creation and use of the term *enkrateia* in the sense of ‘self-mastery’. However, it is somewhat curious that Socrates,

<sup>25</sup> Καί μοι ἔτι τόδε εἰπέ. σὲ αὐτὸν ἐῷσιν ἄρχειν σεαυτοῦ, ἢ οὐδὲ τοῦτο ἐπιτρέπουσί σοι;—Πῶς γάρ, ἔφη, ἐπιτρέπουσιν;—Ἀλλ’ ἄρχει τίς σου;—Ὅδε, παιδαγωγός, ἔφη.—Μὴν δοῦλος ὢν;—Ἀλλὰ τί μὴν; ἡμέτερός γε, ἔφη.—Ἡ δεινόν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἐλεύθερον ὄντα ὑπὸ δούλου ἄρχεσθαι. τί δὲ ποιῶν αὐτοῦτος ὁ παιδαγωγός σου ἄρχει;—Ἄγων δῆπου, ἔφη, εἰς διδασκάλου.

<sup>26</sup> Νέος ἐγώ ποτε ὦν πολλοῖς δὴ ταῦτ’ ἔπαθον· ᾤηθην, εἰ θάπτον ἐμαυτοῦ γενοίμην κύριος, ἐπὶ τὰ κοινὰ τῆς πόλεως εὐθὺς ἰέναι.

<sup>27</sup> Φησὶ γὰρ Ἡρακλέα, ἐπεὶ ἐκ παίδων εἰς ἡβὴν ὥρματο, ἐν ᾗ οἱ νέοι ἤδη αὐτοκράτορες γιγνόμενοι δηλοῦσιν εἴτε τὴν δι’ ἀρετῆς ὁδὸν τρέψονται ἐπὶ τὸν βίον εἴτε τὴν διὰ κακίας, ἐξελθόντα εἰς ἡσυχίαν καθῆσθαι ἀπορούντα ποτέραν τῶν ὁδῶν τράπηται.

<sup>28</sup> Ὅταν γε μὴν ἐκ παίδων εἰς τὸ μειρακιούσθαι ἐκβαίνωσι, τηλικαῦτα οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι παύουσι μὲν ἀπὸ παιδαγωγῶν, παύουσι δὲ ἀπὸ διδασκάλων, ἄρχουσι δὲ οὐδένες ἔτι αὐτῶν, ἀλλ’ αὐτονόμους ἀφίᾳσιν.



far from claiming originality for this use of *heautou archein*, attributes it to everyone. Nevertheless, tradition attributed to Socrates the merit he did not seem ready to grant himself in the *Gorgias*, as is attested by several apothegms which associate Socrates with the expression *heautou archein* understood in the sense of self-mastery.

Socrates said that the best king is the one who is able to govern his own passions. (SSR I C 291)<sup>29</sup>

Socrates affirmed that the greatest power is that of the king, but that the best is that which one exercises over oneself. (SSR I C 186)<sup>30</sup>

Third, as Irwin stresses insistently in his commentary (1979, 190), this agreement between Socrates and common opinion is quite surprising, since it amounts to saying, contrary to Socrates' position in the *Protagoras* (cf. 352b–e, 355a–d, 358c–d), that it is possible to be vanquished or governed by pleasure, and that this defeat, or submission, is not necessarily imputable to ignorance; hence the need for self-mastery. If Socrates still adhered to his position in the *Protagoras*, we would expect him to maintain, against the common opinion, that it is not possible to be governed by pleasures and that self-mastery, insofar as it is distinct from what flows naturally from knowledge, is useless. This divergence between the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* would tend to confirm my hypothesis that the rehabilitation of *enkrateia* coincides with the recognition of the possibility of *akrasia*.<sup>31</sup>

Fourth, by describing the person who governs himself (*heautou archein*)<sup>32</sup> as the person who displays self-mastery (*enkratê auton heautou*), Socrates uses two expressions that must have seemed absurd in view of the doctrine of the *Charmides* concerning relative terms. Indeed, the very fact that one governs oneself, or that one dominates oneself seems to imply that one is governed by oneself, so that the 'self' would be, in a contradictory way, simultaneously governing and governed. Yet the

<sup>29</sup> Σωκράτης ἔλεγεν ἀμείνονα βασιλέα εἶναι τὸν ἑαυτοῦ δυνάμενον ἄρχειν τῶν παθῶν.

<sup>30</sup> Σωκράτης ἔφη μεγίστην μὲν ἀρχὴν εἶναι τὴν βασιλείαν, ἀρίστην δὲ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχειν.

<sup>31</sup> The use of the expression 'to govern oneself' seems to indicate that Plato recognizes the possibility of *akrasia* in the *Gorgias*. Cf. Bobonich (1994), 18: 'failing to rule oneself and being weaker than oneself are standard descriptions of akratic action for Plato'.

<sup>32</sup> The only other two uses of this expression, prior to the *Republic*, are found in the *Alcibiades* (122a, cf. *supra*, n. 18) and in the *Lysis* (208a). In the latter dialogue, 'to govern oneself' does not mean to govern the desires and pleasures within us, but to emancipate ourselves, by means of *sophia*, from the control someone else exerts over us.

Socrates of the *Gorgias* does not find these expressions to be ridiculous, and he uses them without any reservations, as if they were perfectly well-founded and justified. Hence the question: what has happened in order that Socrates should recognize here the possibility of what seemed impossible in the *Charmides*? I see only one answer to this question, which is, moreover, set forth in the *Gorgias*. ‘To govern oneself’ (*heautou archein*) in fact means, as Socrates specifies, governing the desires and pleasures that *are within oneself*. In the light of 492c–493d, where Socrates reports the comments of a learned man, it does seem that the ‘self’, that is, the soul, includes at least two ‘parts’, that is, desires and reason. To be sure, Plato does not yet use the term ‘part’ (*meros*), but the periphrasis ‘this <dimension> of the soul in which desires are found’, which Plato uses twice,<sup>33</sup> leave no room for doubt: *touto tēs psuchês* does indeed designate a part or dimension of the soul.<sup>34</sup> The *Gorgias* thus seems to be the first of Plato’s dialogues to recognize that the soul is not a monolithic entity, and that it includes at least two parts, that is, reason and desires.<sup>35</sup> The rehabilitation of *enkrateia* in Plato thus appears interconnected with the partition of the soul.<sup>36</sup> As soon as Plato admits that the soul includes at least two parts, and that reason does not necessarily impose its law and its sovereignty upon the other part, which is in open conflict with it, *enkrateia* rediscovers a reason for existence which it lacked when the soul was monolithic and

<sup>33</sup> Cf. 493a3–4: τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς τοῦτο ἐν ᾧ ἐπιθυμίας εἰσὶ; 493b1: τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὗ αἱ ἐπιθυμίας εἰσὶ.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Irwin (1979), 95, *ad* 493a: “that of our soul with appetites in it”. It is natural to supplement ‘that’ with ‘part’ here and just below; but the Greek does not show whether Socrates thinks of parts, or, more generally, of aspects of the soul’. It is, however, rather strange to speak of an ‘aspect’ of the soul in which desires are found; this is why I prefer to translate τοῦτο by a term that gives better expression to the fact that desires reside in a ‘place’ of the soul. One finds in the *Alcibiades* an almost identical expression which presents the same ambiguity: at 134c4, the expression τοῦτο αὐτῆς—where the antecedent of αὐτῆς is ψυχή (133c1)—also seems to designate a ‘part’ of the soul. Commenting on this passage, Guthrie observes: “As often, one envies the elusiveness which the omission of the noun makes possible for a Greek. It is by no means certain that ‘part’ is the best word to supply”, (1971), 153, n. 2. Guthrie finally chooses to translate τοῦτο by ‘aspect’.

<sup>35</sup> Several commentators maintain that the *Gorgias* rejects the unitary conception of the soul and recognizes that it contains parts (cf., among others, North (1966), 163–164).

<sup>36</sup> The example of Xenophon suffices to show that *enkrateia*’s reason for existence does not derive necessarily from the partition of the soul, since he never mentions that souls contain parts, at least in his Socratic writings. However, the *Cyropaedia* (VI 1, 41) admits the partition of the soul.

reason was sovereign. This, moreover, is the explanation developed by Socrates himself when, in *Republic* IV, he explains the sense in which the expression ‘to be stronger than oneself’, in spite of its apparently ridiculous nature (*geloion*), is fully justified:

[Socrates] Temperance surely means a kind of orderliness, a control of certain pleasures and appetites. People use the expression, ‘master of oneself’, whatever that means, and various other phrases that point the same way.—Quite true.—Is not ‘master of oneself’ an absurd expression? A man who was master of himself would presumably be also subject to himself, and the subject would be the master; for all these terms apply to the same person.—No doubt.—I think, however, the phrase means that within the man himself, in his soul, there is a better part and a worse; and that he is his own master when the part which is better by nature has the worse under its control. It is certainly a term of praise; whereas it is considered a disgrace, when, through bad breeding or bad company, the better part is overwhelmed by the worse, like a small force outnumbered by a multitude. A man in that condition is called a slave to himself and intemperate. (430e–431b, trans. Cornford)<sup>37</sup>

It is certainly no coincidence if the *Republic*, at the same time as it rehabilitates the expression ‘to be stronger than oneself’, also introduces the metaphor of slavery,<sup>38</sup> whose absence I pointed out in the dialogues preceding the *Republic*. What is more, Plato sometimes uses this metaphor in a sense that seems to me even more radical than in Xenophon: he does not content himself with castigating, in terms comparable to those used by the author of the *Memorabilia*,<sup>39</sup> those who are governed or ‘enslaved’ by their desires, for he also exhorts us to subjugate our desires and to reduce them to slavery:

<sup>37</sup> Κόσμος πού τις, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἡ σωφροσύνη ἐστὶν καὶ ἡδονῶν τινῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν ἐγκράτεια, ὡς φασι κρείττω δὴ αὐτοῦ ἀποφαίνοντες οὐκ οἶδ’ ὄντινα τρόπον, καὶ ἄλλα ἅττα τοιαῦτα ὥσπερ ἵχνη αὐτῆς λέγεται. ἦ γάρ;—Πάντων μάλιστα, ἔφη.—Οὐκοῦν τὸ μὲν κρείττω αὐτοῦ γελοῖον; ὁ γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ κρείττων καὶ ἥττων δήπου ἂν αὐτοῦ εἴη καὶ ὁ ἥττων κρείττων· ὁ αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐν ἅπασιν τούτοις προσαγορεύεται.—Τί δ’ οὐ; Ἀλλ’, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, φαίνεται μοι βούλεσθαι λέγειν οὗτος ὁ λόγος ὡς τι ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τὸ μὲν βέλτιον ἐνι, τὸ δὲ χεῖρον, καὶ ὅταν μὲν τὸ βέλτιον φύσει τοῦ χείρονος ἐγκρατὲς ᾖ, τοῦτο λέγειν τὸ κρείττω αὐτοῦ—ἐπαινεῖ γοῦν—ὅταν δὲ ὑπὸ τροφῆς κακῆς ἢ τινος ὁμιλίας κρατηθῇ ὑπὸ πλείθους τοῦ χείρονος μικρότερον τὸ βέλτιον ὢν, τοῦτο δὲ ὡς ἐν ὀνείδει ψέγειν τε καὶ καλεῖν ἥττω ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἀκόλαστον τὸν οὕτω διακείμενον.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. IV 442b, 444b, VIII 553d, 564a, IX 577d, 589d–e. Cf. also *Phaedrus* 238e; *Laws* I 635d.

<sup>39</sup> In addition to the passages indicated *supra*, n. 16, cf. *Mem.* I 5, 1; I 5, 5; II 6, 1.

[Socrates] And he [*scil.* the democrat] doesn't admit any word of truth into the guardhouse, for if someone tells him that some pleasures belong to fine and good desires and others to evil ones and that he must pursue and value the former and restrain and enslave the latter, he denies all this and declares that all pleasures are equal and must be valued equally. (*Rep.* VIII 561b7–c4, trans. Grube/Reeve)<sup>40</sup>

[Socrates] Now if the victory goes to the better elements in both their minds, which lead them to follow the assigned regimen of philosophy, their life here below is one of bliss and shared understanding. They are modest and fully in control of themselves now that they have enslaved the part that brought trouble into the soul and set free the part that gave it virtue. (*Phaedrus* 256a7–b3, trans. Woodruff/Nehamas)<sup>41</sup>

It is also not a coincidence, it seems to me, if the expression 'to be stronger than oneself' and the metaphor of slavery are intimately linked to the metaphor of the 'king', that is, of the soul that 'reigns' over itself:

[Socrates] Shall we, then, hire a herald, or shall I myself announce that the son of Ariston has given as his verdict that the best, the most just, and the most happy is the most kingly, who rules like a king over himself, and that the worst, the most unjust, and the most wretched is the most tyrannical, who most tyrannizes himself and the city he rules? (*IX* 580b–c, trans. Grube/Reeve)<sup>42</sup>

This is a re-elaboration of the metaphor of the king, since in the *Euthydemus*, the *basilikê tekhnê* is defined only as a function of *sophia*, and is not understood, contrary to the *basilikê tekhnê* of the *Memorabilia*, as control and mastery that one must exercise over pleasures with a view to qualifying oneself for the government of others. It would be a mistake to fail to accord to this re-elaboration of the metaphor of the 'king' all the attention it deserves, insofar as it testifies to an unquestionable influence

<sup>40</sup> Καὶ λόγον γε, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἀληθὴ οὐ προσδεχόμενος οὐδὲ παριεῖς εἰς τὸ φρούριον, ἐάν τις λέγῃ ὡς αἱ μὲν εἰσι τῶν καλῶν τε καὶ ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν ἡδοναί, αἱ δὲ τῶν πονηρῶν, καὶ τὰς μὲν χρὴ ἐπιτηδεύειν καὶ τιμᾶν, τὰς δὲ κολάζειν τε καὶ δουλοῦσθαι· ἀλλ' ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις ἀνανεύει τε καὶ ὁμοίας φησὶν ἀπάσας εἶναι καὶ τιμητέας ἐξ ἴσου.

<sup>41</sup> Ἐάν μὲν δὴ οὖν εἰς τεταγμένην τε δίαίταν καὶ φιλοσοφίαν νικήσῃ τὰ βελτίω τῆς διανοίας ἀγαγόντα, μακάριον μὲν καὶ ὁμονοητικὸν τὸν ἐνθάδε βίον διάγουσιν, ἐγκρατεῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κόσμιοι ὄντες, δουλωσάμενοι μὲν ᾧ κακία ψυχῆς ἐνεγίγνετο, ἐλευθερώσαντες δὲ ᾧ ἀρετή.

<sup>42</sup> Μισθωσώμεθα οὖν κήρυκα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἢ αὐτὸς ἀνείπω ὅτι ὁ Ἀρίστωνος υἱὸς τὸν ἄριστόν τε καὶ δικαιοτάτον εὐδαιμονέστατον ἔκρινε, τοῦτον δ' εἶναι τὸν βασιλικώτατον καὶ βασιλεύοντα αὐτοῦ, τὸν δὲ κάκιστόν τε καὶ ἀδικώτατον ἀθλιώτατον, τοῦτον δὲ αὐτὸν τυγχάνειν ὄντα ὅς ἂν τυραννικώτατος ᾦν ἑαυτοῦ τε ὅτι μάλιστα τυραννῇ καὶ τῆς πόλεως.

in Plato's thought with regard to the importance of the mastery of pleasures. I will limit myself to two further examples. 1) In the *Lysis* (210b–c), Socrates places Lysis before an alternative: to govern or to be governed. Now that which decides whether one occupies the position of governor or of governed is not *enkrateia*, but *sophia*: in the areas in which one is ignorant, one is governed by someone else—as Lysis is by his pedagogue and his father's slaves—whereas in those where one is learned, one governs oneself and one exercises command over others. 'To govern oneself' thus does not signify control over one's appetites, but emancipation, by means of *sophia*, from the guardianship that others exercise over us. In the *Republic*, however, Socrates castigates the tyrant, who, 'although he is incapable of governing himself (*heautou ôn akratôr*), undertakes to govern others (*allôn epicheirêsêi archein*)' (IX 579c), which shows that self-mastery is henceforth conceived as a precondition for the government of others.—2) In the *Lysis*, knowledge and the utility that derives from it are presented as the foundation of *philia* (210c–d), and Socrates accords no importance to the mastery of pleasures with a view towards friendship. In the *Gorgias*, however, Socrates explains to Callicles that *sôphrosunê*, understood as the mastery of pleasures, is a condition *sine qua non* of *philia*.<sup>43</sup>

[Socrates] This is the target which I think one should look to in living, and in his actions he should direct all of his own affairs and those of his city to the end that justice and self-control will be present in one who is to be blessed. He should not allow his appetites to be undisciplined or undertake to fill them up—that's interminably bad—and live the life of a marauder. Such a man could not be dear to another man or to a god, for he cannot be a partner, and where there's no partnership there's no friendship. (507d6–e6, trans. Zeyl)<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> In the *Memorabilia*, Socrates presents *enkrateia* as the first condition for friendship: 'Tell me, Critobulus, he said, if we wanted a good friend, how should we set about our search? Should we first look for a man who can control his desires for food and drink and sex and sleep and idleness? For the man who is a slave to these can't do his duty either to himself or to a friend.—No, of course he can't.—So you think that one should keep away from people who are governed by their desires?—Certainly.' (II 6, 1; trans. Tredennick/Waterfield)

<sup>44</sup> Οὗτος ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ ὁ σκοπὸς εἶναι πρὸς ὃν βλέποντα δεῖ ζῆν, καὶ πάντα εἰς τοῦτο τὰ αὐτοῦ συντείνοντα καὶ τὰ τῆς πόλεως, ὅπως δικαιοσύνη παρέσται καὶ σωφροσύνη τῷ μακαρίῳ μέλλοντι ἔσεσθαι, οὕτω πράττειν, οὐκ ἐπιθυμίας ἑῶντα ἀκολάστους εἶναι καὶ τὰύτας ἐπιχειροῦντα πληροῦν, ἀνήνυτον κακόν, ληστοῦ βίον ζῶντα. οὔτε γὰρ ἂν ἄλλω ἀνθρώπῳ προσφιλὴς ἂν εἴη ὁ τοιοῦτος οὔτε θεῷ· κοινωνεῖν γὰρ ἀδύνατος, ὅτε δὲ μὴ ἓν κοινωνία, φιλία οὐκ ἂν εἴη.

It therefore seems obvious to me that Plato, as soon as he admits the partition of the soul and the possibility of *akrasia*, is led to introduce or to re-elaborate metaphors, all of which have in common that they express the need to master and dominate pleasures and desires.

If it is unquestionable that Plato, in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, becomes reconciled with *enkrateia*, this rehabilitation nevertheless has a limited scale, insofar as *enkrateia* does not acquire a status comparable to that reserved for it by Xenophon, that is, to be the foundation of virtue. In fact, both in the *Gorgias* (491d10–11) and in the *Republic* (430e6–7), *enkrateia* seems to be confused with *sôphrosunê*, and it is hard to see how they are distinguished from one another with regard to the control over appetites (drink, food and sexuality). Does this mean that *enkrateia* is basically nothing other than another name for designating *sôphrosunê*? This conclusion risks missing what is essential, that is, that Plato, at the same time as he becomes reconciled with *enkrateia*, redefines *sôphrosunê* in terms of mastery over the pleasures and desires. Indeed, it is striking to note that prior to the *Gorgias*, *sôphrosunê* is never defined in these terms.<sup>45</sup> Upon reflection, the *Charmides*<sup>46</sup> appears as an attempt to redefine *sôphrosunê*, once the common concept that identifies it with

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. North (1966), 159: 'Plato's systematic study of *sophrosyne* as the control of appetites and desires begins with the *Gorgias*, where the virtue is defined, when first mentioned, as the *polloi* define it—"the control of pleasures and appetites in oneself" (491d); no other definition is ever suggested.' If we make an exception for the *Charmides*, the occurrences of the term *sôphrosunê*, and words of the same family, are very scarce in the early dialogues. Thus, the *Protagoras*, which contains the greatest number of occurrences (28) after the *Charmides* (125), never presents *sôphrosunê* as mastery over pleasures and desires; yet this is paradoxical when one considers that this is the dialogue that most vigorously denies the possibility of *akrasia*. The *Lysis* (216b) is the only early dialogue that alludes to this concept of *sôphrosunê* when it furtively presents the fact of being moderate (τὸ σῶφρον) as the contrary of license (ἀκολασία).—With regard to the *Protagoras*, North affirms: 'The definition of *sophrosyne* that we miss in the *Charmides* is prominent in both the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*' (1966), 159. This affirmation is quite surprising, not only because this definition is absent from the *Protagoras*, but also because North affirms in the same page that the definition seems to appear for the first time in the *Gorgias* (cf. the passage cited at the beginning of this note). With regard to *sôphrosunê* in the *Protagoras*, I subscribe entirely to the observation made by F. Ildefonse: 'The *sôphrosunê* of the *Charmides* and the *Protagoras* is not understood in the sense of "mastery over appetites" or "self-mastery", which is its predominant meaning in the Platonic dialogues of maturity, for instance in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, where it will be defined, but in its primary meaning of "common sense", which, in the *Protagoras*, is identified with *sophia*' (1997), 170, n. 125.

<sup>46</sup> The *Charmides* alone contains more than a third of the occurrences of the term *sôphrosunê* found in Plato's work.

*enkrateia* has been rejected.<sup>47</sup> However, this meaning of *sôphrosunê*, which is clearly set forth and endorsed by Socrates in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, coincides on the one hand with the admission of the soul's partition and, on the other, with the rehabilitation of *enkrateia*. What is more, this meaning of *sôphrosunê* was to be henceforth maintained down to the *Laws* inclusively. *Enkrateia* is therefore not just another name for designating *sôphrosunê*, since it is on its model that Plato redefined the virtue of *sôphrosunê*. Beginning with the *Gorgias*, the lexicon of *sôphrosunê* multiplies its borrowings from the vocabulary of *enkrateia*, that is, of self-control (*heautou archein*),<sup>48</sup> of superiority over oneself (*kreittôn hautou*),<sup>49</sup> and, finally, of domination (*kratein, archein*) over desires and pleasures (*Symposium* 196c).<sup>50</sup>

It is hard not to be struck, upon reading book I of the *Laws*, by the combined and abundant use of the expressions *enkratês*,<sup>51</sup> 'being stronger than oneself' (*kreittôn hautou*),<sup>52</sup> 'to rule over oneself' (*heautou archein*),<sup>53</sup> to which Plato adds a new expression: 'to vanquish oneself' (*to nikan hauton*).<sup>54</sup> These expressions, which Plato uses as synonyms, designate one and the same thing, that is, domination, within mankind, over pleasures and desires. The analogy between the city and the individual, developed as early as the beginning of book I, implies the existence within mankind of a division analogous to that observed within the city. Just as the city that is stronger than itself is the one in which a minority of honest citizens win out over the crowd of unjust citizens (627b), so the person who is stronger than himself is he in whom the better element emerges victorious over the worse. Mankind is thus divided between various opposing tendencies, and it is up to him to ensure the domination

<sup>47</sup> On the near-synonymous character of the terms *sôphrosunê* and *enkrateia* in Xenophon, cf. *Mem.* III 9, 4; North (1966), 128 and 130–131; Foucault (1984), 75; Dorion (2003), 652–653.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Rep.* VIII 558d; 559e, 561b; IX 590c, 590d, 590e, 591a; X 606d. For the *Laws*, cf. *infra*, n. 53.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Rep.* IV 430e; 431b. For the *Laws*, cf. *infra*, n. 52.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. also *Rep.* III 389e; IV 430e; 440a.

<sup>51</sup> I 645e.

<sup>52</sup> I 626e8, 627a3, a8, b7–8, c10, 645b2; cf. also IX 863d. The converse expression, 'to be inferior to oneself' (*ἐαυτοῦ ἥττων*), obviously designates the state of the person who is dominated by pleasures (I 633e).

<sup>53</sup> I 644b7.

<sup>54</sup> I 626c2 and 628c11. At VIII 840b–c, the Athenian had affirmed that victory over the pleasures (840c), is much finer than victories in the gymnasias and other sportive victories, since 'if we win it we live in happiness; if we let ourselves be vanquished, it is the contrary that happens.'

of the better element over the bad ones. Mankind's internal division is expressed in the famous myth of the puppets (644d–645c), according to which human beings must 'cooperate with the fine leading-string of the law' (645a), which is also that of reason. It seems to me revealing that Plato, in the story of this myth, affirms that the meaning of the expression 'to be stronger or less strong than oneself' thus becomes in a way more clear (645b). Just as, in the *Republic*, it is necessary to admit the partition of the soul in order to save this expression from ridicule, so, in the *Laws*, the 'clarity' of the same expression is linked to the existence within mankind of multiple and contradictory tendencies. From this viewpoint, there seems to be perfect continuity between the *Republic* and the *Laws*.<sup>55</sup>

However, this continuity must not conceal the determinant role Plato accords henceforth to exercise and training with a view to acquiring this mastery and domination over pleasures. At the end of the passage on the usefulness of banquets for acquiring mastery over wine and drink, the Athenian insistently emphasizes the importance of exercise and training with a view to 'perfect temperance' with regard to drink (I 647c–d). Plato also recognizes the need for developing physical endurance (*karteria*) with regard to pain, heat, and fatigue (I 633b–c). But *karteria*, together with *enkrateia*, is the other pillar of the ethics of Socrates<sup>x</sup>: the former must endure physical pain, whereas the latter must resist the attraction of physical pleasure.<sup>56</sup>

### Conclusion

In the second part of this study, I have tried to bring to light the main indications and reasons for Plato's reconciliation with the vocabulary of *enkrateia*. To judge by the number of occurrences of terms belonging to the family of *enkrateia*, this reconciliation seems partial and timid. There are only twenty-one occurrences of these terms,<sup>57</sup> a mere nine of which

<sup>55</sup> C. Bobonich (1994) maintains that the *Laws*, although they recognize the possibility of *akrasia*, give a justification of it that marks a progress over that of the *Republic* insofar as it does not rely on a partition of the soul. In a recent study (2003), L. Gerson maintains, on the contrary, that the explanation of the possibility of *akrasia* in the *Laws* is still based on a partition of the soul. Whatever the solution of this problem may be, the continuity I am trying to bring out is that of the conditions of relevance of a problematic expression (κρείττων αὐτοῦ).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Mem.* I 2, 1.

<sup>57</sup> I exclude from this number the occurrences contained in the *Definitions*, the *Letters*, and the *Theages*.



express mastery with regard to pleasures and desires.<sup>58</sup> What is more, there are only two occurrences of the noun *enkrateia*.<sup>59</sup> This reticence to use the vocabulary of *enkrateia* is paradoxical, since Plato elsewhere multiplies the expressions that designate the mastery one must exercise over oneself. I can see two reasons that explain this parsimonious use of the vocabulary of *enkrateia*: first, *sôphrosunê* cannot be reduced to *enkrateia*, because in addition to the control of appetites, it also designates, among other things, self-knowledge<sup>60</sup> and the harmonious order that reigns within the soul.<sup>61</sup> Since *enkrateia* is a mere aspect of *sôphrosunê*, Plato would have impoverished the latter if he had preferred to it the vocabulary of *enkrateia*. Second, and more fundamentally, *enkrateia*, as conceived by the other Socratics, is neither a virtue nor a branch of knowledge, but a kind of ability or strength (*iskhus*) that results from the training (*askêsis*) imposed on body and soul. Now, in the *Republic*, it is ultimately to reason that Plato confides the task of dominating (*kratein*) desires and pleasures,<sup>62</sup> since it can make the desiring part ‘listen to reason’, and persuade it.<sup>63</sup>

[Socrates] But, on the other hand, wouldn’t someone who maintains that just things are profitable be saying, first, that all our words and deeds should insure that the human being within this human being has the most control. (*Rep.* IX 589a6–b1, trans. Grube/Reeve)<sup>64</sup>

[Socrates] Now when judgment is in control and leads us by reasoning toward what is best, that sort of self-control is called ‘being in your right mind’; but when desire takes command in us and drags us without reasoning toward pleasure, then its command is known as ‘outrageousness’. (*Phaedrus* 237e2–238a2, trans. Woodruff/Nehamas)<sup>65</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Gorgias* 491d; *Rep.* III 390b, IV 430e, 431a, IX 589b; *Phaedrus* 256b; *Laws* I 645e, IV 710a, VIII 840c.

<sup>59</sup> *Rep.* III 390b and IV 430e.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Timaeus* 72a; *Philebus* 19c.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Rep.* IV 442c–d.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Rep.* IV 431a, c–d, 439c–d, 444d, IX 589b1; *Phaedrus* 237c; *Timaeus* 42b–d. In the *Republic* (VIII 558d), Socrates emphasizes that the democrat, like the oligarch, ‘masters by force the desires that are within him’, which distinguishes them from the aristocrat, who masters them by reason.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. IV 442b5–d1; VIII 554c11–e5; IX 589a6–b6. On these passages, cf. Bobonich (1994), 12, n. 19 and 25 n. 47.

<sup>64</sup> Οὐκοῦν αὖ ὁ τὰ δίκαια λέγων λυσιτελεῖν φαίη ἂν δεῖν ταῦτα πράττειν καὶ ταῦτα λέγειν, ὅθεν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ ἐντὸς ἀνθρώπος ἔσται ἐγκρατέστατος, (...)

<sup>65</sup> Δόξης μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄριστον λόγῳ ἀγοῦσης καὶ κρατούσης τῷ κράτει σωφροσύνη ὄνομα· ἐπιθυμίας δὲ ἀλόγως ἐλκούσης ἐπὶ ἡδονᾶς καὶ ἀρξάσης ἐν ἡμῖν τῇ ἀρχῇ ὕβρις ἐπωνομάσθη.

Although in the *Laws*, Plato recognizes the determining importance of training for acquiring *sôphrosunê*, he does not, for all that, dissociate it from the intellect. Whereas *phronêsis* comes in the first rank of divine goods (631c), the temperate disposition of the soul, associated with the intellect (631c), comes in second place. Similarly, while it is true that one cannot accede to perfect temperance (*sôphrôn teleôs*) without having sustained a battle against the pleasures and desires that urge us on towards impudence and injustice, victory presupposes the cooperation of reason, exercise, and art (647d). Whereas Plato shows himself reticent to use the term *enkrateia* and to accord to it its own status and existence, which would distinguish it from *sôphrosunê*, Aristotle does not hesitate to accord it a specific status: neither a virtue nor a branch of knowledge, *enkrateia* is nevertheless not the foundation of virtue, as Xenophon wrongly thought, since in reality it is inferior to virtue. Indeed, it is nothing other than a kind of compensatory disposition (*hexis*), which can take over from failing or unstable *sôphrosunê*.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. *EN* VII 1.

## ARISTOTLE ON THE CAUSES OF *AKRASIA*\*

PIERRE DESTRÉE

The conception and explanation Aristotle gives us concerning the phenomenon of *akrasia* appears to present a real paradox. On the one hand, Aristotle seems to accept the common definition of *akrasia* as a lack of self-control owing to a weakness of a person's will, or rational desire (what Aristotle calls *boulêsis*). Thus, paraphrasing Aristotle's famous example, I may perfectly well know, in a general way, that eating sweets is bad for my health, and I may know in a particular way that this cake is bad for my health, and I eat it anyway, because I lack the strength of will to refrain from eating it. My resolution to refrain from eating sweets, which implies refraining from eating this piece of cake on the table in front of me, finds itself 'canceled' by the desire I have to eat the piece of cake. Such a conception is found in certain passages of Book VII of the *Nichomachean Ethics* (*NE*), where Aristotle says that the akratic person acts against his own decision not to eat the cake and, in other passages in his works, notably in *De Anima* (*DA*), where *akrasia* is presented as a conflict between two desires (III 11, 12–14). On another hand, though, Aristotle appears at times to defend (particularly in *NE* VII 3)<sup>1</sup> a strongly intellectualist idea of *akrasia*: an akratic action isn't caused by a lack or weakness of will, but by a lack of knowledge. If I give in to my desire to eat the piece of cake, then at the moment when I eat it I 'have lost' in some way or other the knowledge which was stopping me from eating sweets.

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<sup>1</sup> I follow convention in attributing this text to the *NE*. It belongs to one of three books which the two ethics have in common, and judging strictly in terms of style these three books are in many regards closer to the books of *EE*, and might all be cited as belonging to the *EE*.

In the early chapters of Book VII, this paradox crystallizes around the figure of Socrates. According to Aristotle, Socrates denies that *akrasia* is possible, understood as a conflict between reason and desire, to the extent that the bad choice is always caused by ignorance. If I eat this piece of cake, it's because at the moment of eating, I don't have (or no longer have) the ethical knowledge that would forbid my eating that kind of sweet. But such a notion of ethical fault, which thus would be nothing but a lack of knowledge, seems totally at odds with ordinary experience, which is why Aristotle rejects it categorically: 'To say this is to say something at odds with what patently appears to be the case' (2, 1145b27–28). But throughout Book VII, many times, Aristotle continues to say that *akrasia* is in some way or other a lack of knowledge. At the end of Chapter iii/5, he even speaks to some extent approvingly of Socrates in this regard (1147b13–17).

Since the 19th century, interpreters have made attempts to resolve this paradox with Socrates at the centre, by taking sides with one or the other branch of the text. Partisans of the intellectualist interpretation either take VII, 3 and completely neglect other, less intellectualist passages (closer to the common understanding of the matter), or they accuse Aristotle of having given two incompatible accounts of *akrasia*.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the defenders of the non-intellectualist interpretation take seriously the Aristotelian texts which accredit the everyday notion of *akrasia*, and attempt to minimize the problematic of ignorance by interpreting it in a quasi-metaphorical sense as a lack of desire.<sup>3</sup> The first group maintains that Aristotle ends up approving Socrates' position, while the second group's members think the reference to Socrates in VII, iii/5 must be understood as ironic.

I would like to defend a conciliatory position. Aristotle, I claim, is trying to reconcile antinomian positions by correcting first one and then the other.<sup>4</sup> He accepts the commonplace which sees a lack, or weakness

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<sup>2</sup> In this group we find Robinson (1977), Joachim (1951), Gauthier-Jolif (1970), and more recently Timmermann (2000), Grgic (2002), Bostock (2000) and Vergnières (2002). This reading was already common among Greek and Latin commentators. Robinson, Joachim, Timmermann, Grgic and Vergnières do not even mention the other, apparently contrary texts, while Bostock accuses Aristotle of contradicting himself (following, already, Ross (1923), 244).

<sup>3</sup> In this group, with differences of degree, and a fair amount of variation in the details of their arguments, the most influential studies are Dahl (1984) and Charles (1984). I note that the premises of this type of interpretation are particularly evident in the commentary of Burnet (1900).

<sup>4</sup> Space will not permit us to enter here into the details of the famous methodological

of will as the cause of an akratic action. But he also accepts the Socratic explanation, to the extent that there is also a cognitive failure at the moment of the act of *akrasia*. His discussion then will focus upon the question of knowledge. Aristotle can accept and then reconcile the two opposed positions by specifying their limits or extent. Common opinion reckons that the akratic person ‘knows’ that what he is about to do is ethically blameworthy at the moment of commission of the act. On the other hand, Socrates thinks that the akratic doesn’t ‘know’ this. But if we understand the verb ‘know’ in two different senses, we can reconcile the two positions. Socrates is right to speak of ignorance, if ‘ignorance’ is a lack, or a momentary loss of a peculiar knowledge (what Aristotle will consider the ‘minor premise’), but he would be wrong if he intended to refer to all ‘knowledge’ of whatever type. Common opinion is right to say that the akratic ‘knows’ something, but this knowledge is either general, or ineffective.

My defence in support of the position just described will have two parts. I will first attempt to defend an intellectualist interpretation of the famous passage, VII 3, 1147a24–b17. Then I will try to show in what way the texts, in which Aristotle seems to support the common opinion about *akrasia*, can be read in accordance with the readings in the first part.

### 1. *Desire and Phantasia: A reading of NE VII, iii/5 from DA and DMA*

Before examining in some detail the famous passage of chapter 3 in which Aristotle gives us his causal explanation of *akrasia*, we must clearly see the precise *aporia* we are working on. This *aporia* is stated from the outset: ‘But one might raise the problem: in what sense does a person have a correct grasp when he behaves uncontrolledly?’ (1145b21–22).<sup>5</sup> This *aporia* is aimed at the common opinion which Aristotle has just expressed: ‘the un-self-controlled person acts because of his affective

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passage at 1145b2–7, concerning notably the question of whether the *phainomena*, the *legomena*, and the *endoxa* constitute one single reality or not. I will content myself with supposing, as concerns the needs of my topic here, that the *endoxa* which Aristotle feels obliged to ‘leave standing’ contain at least as much of Socrates’ position (or at least certain aspects of it) as the common opinion summed up at 1145b12–13.

<sup>5</sup> Ἀπορήσειε δ’ ἂν τις πῶς ὑπολαμβάνων ὁρθῶς ἀκρατεῦταιί τις. When quoting Aristotle’s *NE*, I use Rowe’s translation, sometimes slightly modified.

state, knowing what he is doing is a bad thing' (1145b12–13).<sup>6</sup> But why do we have to ask ourselves what sort of judgment or 'grasp' the akratic has? Because Socrates has denied that the akratic exercised the good judgment. I cite again the following part of the passage:

Well, some deny that it is possible to do so if one has knowledge; it would be an astonishing thing if, when knowledge is in us—this was Socrates' thought—something else overpowers it and drags it about like a slave. For Socrates used completely to resist the idea, on the grounds that there was no such thing as behaving uncontrolledly; no one, he would say, acts contrary to what is best while grasping that he is doing so, but only because of ignorance. Now to say this is to say something at odds with what patently appears to be the case, and we need to ask about the agent's affective state: if it is because of ignorance, what mode of ignorance turns out to be involved; for it is evident that the person acting uncontrolledly doesn't think of doing it, before he gets into the affective state in question. (1145b22–31)<sup>7</sup>

This passage is crucial, in my view, for understanding what Aristotle is doing. At first sight, he appears to reject categorically the position of Socrates, which contradicts experience. But then how can we understand Aristotle's admitting that we need to investigate the type of ignorance that affects the akratic? In reality, what Aristotle mainly rejects is Socrates' conclusion that there cannot be any such thing as *akrasia*. But he doesn't at all reject the explanation Socrates gives, or at least doesn't absolutely reject the idea of a type of ignorance which in some way or other causes bad choices. Aristotle appears to level a sort of reproach against Socrates: Socrates may be right to speak of ignorance, but he is wrong not to specify what he means by 'ignorance' in this sense. For this reason Aristotle decides to explain to us the sense in which one may after all speak of ignorance in relation to the phenomenon of *akrasia*. But this program also concerns the knowledge that common opinion attributes to the akratic: after acknowledging that Socrates is right at least as concerns the applicability of the concept of ignorance (which must be specified), Aristotle must also specify the sense in which

<sup>6</sup> Ὁ μὲν ἀκρατής εἰδὼς ὅτι φαῦλα πράττει διὰ πάθος.

<sup>7</sup> Ἐπιστάμενον μὲν οὖν οὐ φασὶ τινες οἷόν τε εἶναι· δεινὸν γὰρ ἐπιστήμης ἐνούσης, ὥς ᾤετο Σωκράτης, ἄλλο τι κρατεῖν καὶ περιέλκειν αὐτὴν ὥσπερ ἀνδράποδον. Σωκράτης μὲν γὰρ ὅλως ἐμάχετο πρὸς τὸν λόγον ὡς οὐκ οὔσης ἀκρασίας· οὐθένα γὰρ ὑπολαμβάνοντα πράττειν παρὰ τὸ βέλτιστον, ἀλλὰ δι' ἄγνοιαν. οὗτος μὲν οὖν ὁ λόγος ἀμφισβητεῖ τοῖς φαινομένοις ἐναργῶς, καὶ δεῖον ζητεῖν περὶ τὸ πάθος, εἰ δι' ἄγνοιαν, τίς ὁ τρόπος γίνεται τῆς ἀγνοίας. ὅτι γὰρ οὐκ οἰεταί γε ὁ ἀκρατεύμενος πρὶν ἐν τῷ πάθει γενέσθαι, φανερόν.

he intends the term, 'knowledge'. He can no longer simply accept it as a concept. The questions of ignorance and knowledge are the two faces of a coin: the *aporia* to be resolved is that of determining in what precise sense the akratic has and hasn't knowledge when he acts in an akratic way.

Following that brief preliminary remark, let us now try to read *NE* VII 3. Let's begin by summarizing briefly the traditional interpretation, such as we find it very ably defended in the commentary of Gauthier-Jolif. Following the Paraphrast (141, 30–31), one can see in the famous lines 1147a31–34 two competing syllogisms.<sup>8</sup> An intemperate person (the *akolastos*) grasps one single syllogism: 'If everything sweet should be tasted, and this (some particular thing) is sweet, one will necessarily at the same time also do this, provided that one can do it, and is not prevented' (1147a29–31).<sup>9</sup> The akratic is distinguished from the intemperate person in two ways: he possesses ethically good practical knowledge, and therefore an ethically good rule which prohibits him from eating sweets (or at least too many sweet things, enough to harm his health), and which serves as the major premise for one syllogism, but in addition he possesses general knowledge which furnishes the major premise for another syllogism: 'everything sweet is pleasant' (a32). By contrast, the minor premise of the intemperate person's syllogism is the same as that in the two syllogisms of the akratic: 'this is sweet.' The result of the intemperate person's syllogism is easy to see: he subsumes the minor under the major and arrives at the conclusion which Aristotle considers equivalent to action, in this case eating the piece of cake. But what is the conclusion in action of the akratic's syllogism? Same conclusion and same action as the intemperate person's: he eats the cake. How is that possible? How is it that the akratic's ethical rule didn't manage to help him avoid the action? Or, how is it that his ethical knowledge failed to 'have the force' (this is the etymology of *a-krasia*) to resist the attraction of the pleasure of eating the cake?

According to the traditional intellectualist interpretation, the akratic has committed a fault of subsumption (as Aquinas said): rather than subsuming the minor under the major premise which was the prescription

<sup>8</sup> Some interpreters (e.g. Kenny, Natali, McKerlie) have tried to oppose this presentation, considering that the phrase 'everything that is sweet is pleasant' is the first part of the minor. But such a presentation seems less probable.

<sup>9</sup> Εἰ παντός γλυκέος γεύεσθαι δεῖ, τοῦτι δὲ γλυκὺ ὡς ἐν τι τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον, ἀνάγκη τὸν δυνάμενον καὶ μὴ κωλύμενον ἅμα τοῦτο καὶ πράττειν.

of practical reason, he subsumes it under another major premise, ‘everything sweet is pleasant’, and then draws the conclusion, which is to eat the cake. The akratic doesn’t arrive at the right conclusion, which is the action of refraining from eating the cake; because of his *epithumia*, he doesn’t use his first major premise. According to Gauthier-Jolif, the main formula in this description lies in the three little words, ‘this is active’, taking the referent of ‘this’ as the second major premise, which is thus in act, while the first major remains *in potentia*.

Non-intellectualist interpreters have formulated two main objections to the above reading.

The first objection consists in showing that according to the terms themselves of the double syllogism occurring in 1147a31–35, Aristotle clearly indicates that the akratic has in reality inferred two conclusions from two syllogisms: ‘reason says to abstain from this thing, but the appetite pushes one (to eat the cake)’ (a34).<sup>10</sup> If we take this proposition seriously, we must interpret the expression *hē teleutaia protasis* in line b9 in some other way; if the akratic has really inferred the proper conclusion, in addition to the bad one, Aristotle wouldn’t be able to say, as the traditional interpretation takes him to say, that the akratic doesn’t have the knowledge of the minor premise (which must be rewritten as: ‘this is a sweet thing belonging to the class of things I must stay away from’). For *teleutaia protasis* we must understand the conclusion of the first syllogism. Thus it isn’t the minor premiss which is the object of ignorance, but the conclusion: ‘you must not eat this cake’.<sup>11</sup>

The second objection bears on the nature of ignorance. The traditional interpretation holds that this *agnoia* (which is explicitly mentioned in line b6) is a purely cognitive error of exactly the same type as the errors analysed in the *Prior Analytics*. As we see clearly in comparing the parallel passage in the *Magna Moralia* (1201b24 sqq), which refers to this text, the type of error described in the *Pr. An.* is precisely the error found in the second explanation Aristotle provides in his passing in review the different senses of ‘possessing science’. Briefly, the traditional interpretation takes those first three explanations as a homogeneous group, in which the first two solutions, which are clearly of the intellectualist type, are placed on the same level as the third one,

<sup>10</sup> Ἡ μὲν οὖν λέγει φεύγειν τοῦτο, ἡ δ’ ἐπιθυμία ἄγει.

<sup>11</sup> This interpretation has been defended by Kenny (1966) and Santas (1969), and then was taken up by Charles (1984), Dahl (1984), Bogen & Moravcsik (1982).



where Aristotle is comparing the akratic with the drunk, the madman and the sleeper. But there can be no question of this being a homogeneous group, insofar as Aristotle presents the third explanation with the remark that here it is a question of understanding the expression ‘have knowledge (science)’ in another way than that understood by those of whom we are speaking’ (1147a10–11), that is, in a way different from the first two explanations. What, then, is this difference? For the non-intellectualist interpreters, the metaphor of the drunkard or that of the actor are very important, since they allow us to understand *agnoia* other than as a purely cognitive fault. A drunk who says that he has to quit drinking now understands perfectly well what he says, especially if he is only tipsy, and the same is true of the actor when he recites from memory a speech on the stage. By contrast, what both ‘ignore’ in a non-cognitive sense of this word, or what they aren’t taking into account, is the weight of their words. The akratic understands the meaning of the conclusion he enunciates: ‘I must not eat sweets’, but he says it the way the drunk says ‘I must quit drinking’, or the way the actor says ‘I love you’ to an actress in a play on stage. The words are without consequence, that is, without real effect. They are ‘just air’. Why? Because the subject who pronounces them doesn’t feel the desire which would correspond to what the words proclaim. The drunk doesn’t really want to quit, and the actor doesn’t really love the actress.

This type of reading is based mainly upon two details in the text. First, the verb *sumphuēnai* in 1147a22 is understood by non-intellectualist interpreters in the sense that Aristotle is taken as referring to a kind of knowledge which is not yet incorporated or mixed in with the desire to act.<sup>12</sup> And later, Aristotle adds something regarding the mode in which the conclusion of the practical syllogism is carried out: ‘if everything sweet should be tasted, and this (particular thing) is sweet, one will necessarily at the same time also do this, provided that one can do it, and is not prevented’ (1147a29–30). Normally one understands this last clause, as with others like it, as indicating a possibility of external interference, in view of the coincidence between conclusion and action. And one knows that this coincidence may nonetheless sometimes be less than total, at least with the syllogism of the overcoat or that of the house being built (cf. *DMA*, 701a16 ff.) where the conclusion, ‘I need

<sup>12</sup> We may notice that such a reading is suggested by the Paraphrast, 141, 17: ‘the knowledge is not in the *ethos* yet’.

to make an overcoat', or a house, doesn't necessarily imply immediate action to make an overcoat. I can make a decision today to make an overcoat, and then put executing that decision off until tomorrow, or never get around to it, through pure procrastination, without ever questioning the original decision. In short, between the conclusion of the practical syllogism, or the decision made, and action itself, there is room for a certain amount of play which allows the desire to carry out the decision to be lost, and, according to non-intellectualist interpreters, that is what happens in the case of *akrasia*: here, in contrast to the case of the intemperate person, that which 'prevents' action in accordance with a decision is just the fact that the one who has decided no longer feels the desire to act in accordance with the decision.

I think the principal interest in this kind of reading is the possibility of putting the accent on the specificity of the type of *agnoia* implied in *akrasia*, which cannot be purely cognitive in nature, on pain of becoming completely incredible; the strongest argument for this position, which indeed seems difficult to deny, rests on the distinction Aristotle himself makes at lines 1147a26–27 between theory and practice; thus we must understand the comparisons or metaphors of the drunken man or the actor on the level of *praxis*, and also understand the other metaphors, of the sleeping man or the madman, as analogies whose meaning must be adapted to the level of *praxis*.

Nonetheless, it seems to me that the arguments supporting this type of interpretation are not convincing.

As many interpreters have remarked,<sup>13</sup> it is quite difficult to believe that *teleutaia protasis* can have the meaning of 'conclusion' here, rather than 'minor premise', which is its usual meaning. It is true that the term *protasis* can mean 'proposition', but we can find no other example in the entire *corpus aristotelicum* where *teleutaia protasis* means conclusion, and the same is true for the expression *eschatos horos* in 1147b14, which is obviously synonymous. Above all, Aristotle himself uses the technical term *sumperanthen* for 'conclusion' in line 1147a27, when he presents his theory of the practical syllogism. Therefore it is impossible to see why, only a few lines later, he would have used the expression, *teleutaia protasis*, in such an unusual sense. Moreover, when he speaks of the possibility of *agnoia*, in the paragraphs preceding our passage, Aristotle

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<sup>13</sup> Beginning with Hardie (1980), 287–289. See also Natali (2000), 108, and Bostock (2000), 132.

explicitly refers it either to the major premise or to the minor premise, but not to the conclusion.

The non-intellectualist interpretation is correct in pointing out that Aristotle wants to give us another explanation of what 'having knowledge' means, beginning with line 1147a10. But I think it is wrong in neglecting a rapprochement we cannot help making with other passages, especially a well known passage from *De Generatione Animalium* (735a9–11), in which he distinguishes between the geometer in the process of practicing his art as geometer, the geometer for the moment not practicing his art, and the geometer asleep, and thus prevented from exercising his capacity. There are therefore three levels of knowledge or, more exactly, three senses of the expression 'having (a certain) knowledge': having it in act, meaning using it actively, possessing it *in potentia*, as being able to use it, and possessing it *in potentia*, but only in the conditional sense (one could use it if one were not prevented from so doing). For our purposes, the most important thing is to see that such knowledge *in potentia* is a completely inactive knowledge, and even incapable of being activated, depending on the state in which the agent finds himself (sleep, madness or drunkenness), preventing the agent from activating the knowledge he nonetheless possesses. In other words, and allowing for some variation in the exact sense, the knowledge of the akratic, whose state is compared to the sleeper, etc., is completely *in potentia*, but in fact completely impotent and ineffective. And it will not help to remind this man that he knows very well that he should abstain from this or that in order to make him stop the bad action he is performing. The sleeper would have to wake up, the madman would have to become sane, the drunk would have to sleep it off before becoming able to put his practical knowledge to work, a knowledge which he has 'lost', in one way or another, during the time of his *pathos*. Certainly, I repeat, we must undoubtedly understand the nature of this ignorance at the level of *praxis*, but the error of the non-intellectualist interpretation is to minimize or neglect this description of the knowledge of the akratic, which is of the same type as the knowledge *in potentia* of the geometer who is asleep. This description must be kept in mind in order for us to appreciate the exact sense in which we can say that the akratic is conscious of doing something bad at the moment he eats the cake.

After these critical remarks, we must now enter into the heart of our problematic. I think our famous lines 1147a31–35, in which Aristotle

sets forth the double syllogism of the akratic, raise two problems. For the intellectualist interpreters, there is no doubt that it is the *epithumia* which prevents the akratic from carrying out the inference of the good syllogism, and which permits or incites him to carry out the bad syllogism, and to infer the bad conclusion, which leads to the action of eating the piece of cake. But these interpreters don't explain clearly enough how and why this *epithumia* manages to prevent the subject from making the good inference. For non-intellectualist interpreters, one needs rather to say that the *epithumia* has taken the place of rational desire, of *boulêsis*, whose absence explains why the subject, who can state the conclusion of the good syllogism, nonetheless fails to carry it out. Still, they don't really explain how it happens that there should be no rational desire. That is indeed the crucial question, which Aristotle appears to ask himself when he adds: 'for it (the *epithumia*) can move each of the parts (of the body)' (1147a35).<sup>14</sup> This in fact means that in this case, in which the *epithumia* pushes us to eat the cake, it is the *epithumia* which has the power to move all the parts of our body (legs to carry us closer to the table, hands to grab the slice of cake, jaws to open up to eat the cake), while there is precisely no *boulêsis* capable of stopping us, that is, of stopping the various parts of our body.

Thus the two most important questions are: why does *epithumia* stop the subject from inferring a conclusion as a result of the good syllogism? And why is there no *boulêsis*, but only *epithumia* which can set the parts of the akratic's body in motion? Certainly, Aristotle doesn't answer these questions directly, but I think we can reconstruct what his answers would have been on the basis of other texts. It hasn't been sufficiently remarked on that our passage, a particularly brief account of the 'cause' of akrasia, appears to be presented by Aristotle himself as a sort of resume of another problematic, where he refers his reader to the 'physiologists' who will be able to explain to him in greater detail how the akratic can recover his knowledge. On the other hand, it must be insisted upon the importance of the adverb *phusikôs* (1147a24) which Aristotle uses to characterize his explanation. Some have thought that

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<sup>14</sup> Κινεῖν γὰρ ἕκαστον δύναται τῶν μορίων. Some interpreters (Kenny (1979), 159; Charles (1984), 130; Bostock (2000), 129) understand this text as significant: 'Each (of the parts of the soul) can move (the body)', a sort of reprise of his theory of movement in which 'each' refers to the rational part of the soul, of which the *boulêsis* is the corresponding desire, and the irrational part or *epithumia*. But it is hard to see what this reminder is doing here, inasmuch as there is no *boulêsis* capable of stopping the movement of the akratic.

this explanation is 'physical' to the extent that the three explanations which came before were only 'dialectical', that is, approaches which still did not really explain *akrasia*. Some non-intellectualist interpreters have even thought, going further, that the 'physical' explanation is the only real explanation endorsed by Aristotle. But this interpretation is unlikely, since Aristotle doesn't say that the first three explanations are only '*logikós*' (this term often—perhaps always—has a negative meaning), and he expressly takes up the example or the metaphor of the drunken man in the third explanation, which thus cannot be rejected as not being 'true'. Therefore we must take the term *phusikós* as significant 'from the point of view of the study of the *phusis*', since the question concerns causality.<sup>15</sup> These two remarks encourage me to say that we must look for the solution in the light of other research, much more detailed, which is set forth in the no less famous chapters of *De Motu Animalium*, 6–8 and *De Anima*, III, 7–11 which present us with the Aristotelian theory of the movement of living beings, man above all, and where *akrasia* is also mentioned, though only in passing.

It isn't possible here go into great detail concerning these difficult chapters of the *DMA* and *DA*, or their eventual differences, but nevertheless we may draw out a few crucial indications which concern our problem here. In the *DA*, Aristotle's point of departure is relatively clear: it is a matter of knowing which one of the soul's faculties permits the movement of the living being. And the answer is also relatively clear, at least as concerns its general formulation: intelligence and desire can move us, and the important thing to know is their relative role in respect of any given movement. On the other hand, from the point of view of the object, Aristotle's point of departure is just as clear. As he repeats several times, the prime mover of all animal movement is an end, that is, a good which is the object of desire (*to orekton*) as well as a thinkable object (*to dianoeton*). This object described as prime mover and immobile is always the end of all action or movement of living beings. From this point of view, as well, the question is to know how and in what proportions the passage occurs from the desirability of the object as such (if we may speak in this way) to its being desired by a living being, and to what extent the intellectual faculties and the power of desiring are implied in this transfer.

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<sup>15</sup> In this sense I share the thesis of Bostock (2000), who sees in this 'physical' explanation a sort of addition which in reality is not necessary for the practical knowledge of the political man as such, who can be satisfied with the third solution.

It appears to me that we may (to treat the matter briefly) draw from these two series of texts two essential factors (there will be a third moment later) of all movement or action, from the point of view of the agent. What is the final cause of action? Undoubtedly, as Aristotle repeatedly affirms, the cause is desire, or more exactly one of the three forms or species of desire, namely *epithumia*, *thumos*, or *boulêsis*. This first explanatory moment is expressly affirmed by Aristotle, but it also comes out of his persistent refusal to make *nous* or *dianoia* the final or immediate cause of action: by itself, intelligence cannot set anything in motion, it must always be accompanied by desire. The second explanatory moment regarding action is derived from this insistence as well: if it is true that intelligence cannot be the final cause of action, it is also no less true that it is a cause of it. But in what sense? In the sense that the final cause of action, which desire is, or the desiring faculty, is dependent on intelligence. I think one of the key passages in the Aristotelian theory of action is the following: ‘Organic parts are prepared as needed by the affections, the affections by desire, and desire by representation, which is produced either by thought or through sensation’ (*DMA* 8, 702a17–19).<sup>16</sup> Representation is the cause of desire. But in what sense exactly? In what way, and how does representation ‘prepare’ desire? By being precisely the representation of the good which is the object of desire. If we take the initial thesis of Aristotle seriously, namely, that the final cause of movement is a good which is desirable (the good being the cause of desire), then it is necessary for the subject to know this good in one way or another. As Aristotle says in the celebrated formula: ‘We desire a thing because it seems good to us.’ (*Met.* XII 7, 1072a29). Therefore this good, in order to give rise to our desire to obtain it, must be present in our ‘mind’; in order to act, we must represent this object to ourselves as a good. That is why Aristotle insists on the role (even without explaining it) of *phantasia* in the two texts on the cause of movement in animals, to the point of holding *phantasia* and practical intelligence as equivalent. In order for the desirable object to become a real object of desire for an agent, that agent must represent it to himself as being a good; and when he does represent it to himself as a good, he desires it at the same moment: ‘The representations are like perceptions for the faculty of reflection

<sup>16</sup> Τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὀργανικὰ μέρη παρασκευάζει ἐπιτηδείως τὰ πάθη, ἡ δ’ ὄρεξις τὰ πάθη, τὴν δ’ ὄρεξιν ἡ φαντασία· αὕτη δὲ γίνεται ἢ διὰ νοήσεως ἢ δι’ αἰσθήσεως.

of the soul; each time it affirms or denies that such and such an object is good or bad, it pursues or flees from it. That is why the soul never thinks without a representation.’ (*DA* III 7, 431a14–17).<sup>17</sup> Certainly, Aristotle repeatedly insists that this good can be a real good or an apparent good, and he uses the same verb for this, ‘appear’ (*phainesthai*): the apparent good is a *phainomenon agathon*, and the faculty which represents it as such is a *phantasia*. But this usage, negative if you will, of *phantasia* should not obscure the fact that in reality all goods, whether real or only ‘apparent’, must be ‘represented’, must be goods which ‘appear’. Aristotle says this in the *NE* in a general formula: ‘every one of us aims at what appears good to us’ (III 5, 1114a31–32).<sup>18</sup>

Given that our text in *NE* VII 3 implicitly sends us back to the ‘physical’ explanations of the causes of movement or action which we find in *DA* and *DMA*, I propose then reading our lines 1147a31–35 in the light of these explanations. That which is the cause of the movement of the akratic is without doubt the presence of the *epithumia* which ‘leads’ the agent to eat the cake, which Aristotle is explaining when he adds that it is the *epithumia* in fact which is ‘capable of setting in movement any of the parts of our bodies’. And the *epithumia* is effectively capable of this because of the absence of any *boulêsis* which could stop the agent, or make him pass up the cake. But what is the cause of this *epithumia*? And what is the cause of the lack of any *boulêsis*? In the light of our texts from the *DA* and the *DMA*, this can only be the *phantasia*. That which doesn’t produce any *boulêsis* is a lack of *phantasia logistikê* which means that the cake never gets presented as being a non-good from which one must abstain; that which produces the *epithumia* which pushes the agent to eat the cake is a *phantasia*, in this case a *phantasia aisthêtikê*, which presents the cake as an ‘apparent’ good, that is, as something pleasant which one must desire. Formalized in these terms, which belong to the practical syllogism, this ‘physical’ explanation becomes that of a subsumption of the minor premise ‘this is a sweet’ under the major premise ‘everything that is sweet is pleasant = is a good’, while a good subsumption of the same minor under the good major doesn’t take place.

<sup>17</sup> Τῇ δὲ διανοητικῇ ψυχῇ τὰ φαντάσματα οἷον αἰσθήματα ὑπάρχει, ὅταν δὲ ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν φήσῃ ἢ ἀποφήσῃ, φεύγει ἢ διώκει· διὸ οὐδέποτε νοεῖ ἄνευ φαντάσματος ἢ ψυχῆ.

<sup>18</sup> Πάντες ἐφίενται τοῦ φαινομένου ἀγαθοῦ. On the role of *phantasia* in action, I am especially indebted to Labarrière (1993) and Hankinson (1990).

But there remains an essential question which must be resolved: why is it precisely a *phantasia* of this type which makes the agent see the cake as a pleasant and thus desirable thing, rather than the other type of *phantasia*? Here we must add the third moment of the analysis of action: *phantasia* is itself 'prepared' by desire, or more precisely by the state in which the desiring faculty is found at the moment at which the object enters onto the scene, which will provoke movement or action. We need, at least as concerns the requirements of causal explanation, to distinguish between two desires, or two moments within desire. There is the desire which is the final cause of action: this, in the case of our akratic, is the desire to eat the piece of cake. The cause of this desire is a representation of this cake as being a good. This cake is thus not only a desirable object, but also, since it is recognized as desirable, it is effectively desired by the agent. But in order for this agent to see, or to represent to himself the cake as a good of this type, that is, a desirable thing according to the nature of things that are pleasant, he must have within himself prior to this point a desire which could be termed more general, which is the desire to eat sweet things. I think this third moment is indeed present in the analysis of lines 1147a31–35, particularly in line a33: 'there happens to be appetite in the agent' (*tuchê d'epithumia enousa*). This specification added by Aristotle through the use of the adverb *tuchê* is quite important in my view. Aristotle isn't saying here that the sight of the cake gives rise to the desire to eat it, but rather that the agent finds himself overtaken, at that moment, by a desire to eat something sweet or pleasant. And on the basis of such a desire to eat something sweet or pleasant, the agent will see the cake as something pleasant to eat, and that will give rise to the desire to eat it here and now. Let us warn against one misunderstanding: I do not at all mean to make Aristotle say that it's because I desire something that it seems good to me. Aristotle's 'realism' is very clear: it is because some object is good, that is, desirable, that it can seem good to me, and therefore I can desire it. Also, that which is caused by the present state of my desire in general is not the condition of the object, which is desirable (it is sweet, it is pleasant) independently of the agent, but indeed rather the condition of my *phantasia*, or more exactly the exercise of my *phantasia* as *aisthêtikê* or *logistikê*. What happens in the case of the akratic is that the state of his general desire, at the moment when he sees the cake, is an appetite-state which permits only the exercise of his *phantasia aisthêtikê*, which only precisely represents the 'apparent' good, that is, the pleasant.



It is true that this third moment doesn't seem to be present in the analyses of the causes of movement in the passages in *DA* and *DMA*. But this is a doctrine which Aristotle sets forth very clearly elsewhere, particularly in *NE*, whose lines, the most important of all for our purposes, must be cited in extenso:

We shall then be saying that for the person of excellence the object of wishing is what is truly wished, whereas for the bad person it is [whatever appears good to him] as chance will have it, just as on the physical level too the things that are truly healthful are healthful for people in good condition, whereas a different set of things are healthy for those that are diseased (...); for the good person discriminates correctly in every set of circumstances, and in every set of circumstances what is true is apparent to him (...). But most people are deceived, and the deception seems to come about because of pleasure; for it appears a good thing when it is not. (III 4, 1113a25–b1)<sup>19</sup>

The comparison between the excellent man and a man in good health sheds considerable light on the question of *akrasia*. It is because a man is 'in good health' that the truth, that is, the truth 'of practice' or the real good, can 'appear' to him, while the *polloi*, the many, who are not 'in good health', evaluate things badly and mistake pleasure for real and true goodness. Certainly, it is not a question of the direct representation of something as pleasant rather than as non-good, but what is meant is a defect in the ability to evaluate things in general. What is important here in a general way, here where Aristotle appears to condemn all the choices made by the many, can be applied to the case of our akratic, especially if we compare this passage with another, coming from Book VI:

Chains of practical reasoning have a starting point—'since the end, i.e. what is best, is such-and-such' (whatever it may be: for the sake of argument let it be anything one happens to choose), and this is not apparent except to the person who possesses excellence, since vice perverts us and causes us to be deceived about the starting points of action. (VI 12, 1144a31–36)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Τῷ μὲν οὖν σπουδαίῳ τὸ κατ' ἀλήθειαν εἶναι, τῷ δὲ φαύλῳ τὸ τυχόν, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν σωμάτων τοῖς μὲν εὖ διακειμένοις ὑγιεινὰ ἐστὶ τὰ κατ' ἀλήθειαν τοιαῦτα ὄντα, τοῖς δ' ἐπινόσοις ἕτερα, (...) ὁ σπουδαῖος γὰρ ἕκαστα κρίνει ὀρθῶς, καὶ ἐν ἑκάστοις τάληθες αὐτῷ φαίνεται (...). Ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς δὲ ἡ ἀπάτη διὰ τὴν ἡδονὴν ἔοικε γίνεσθαι· οὐ γὰρ οὐσα ἀγαθὸν φαίνεται.

<sup>20</sup> Οἱ γὰρ συλλογισμοὶ τῶν πρακτῶν ἀρχὴν ἔχοντές εἰσιν, ἐπειδὴ τοιόνδε τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ ἄριστον, ὅτιδήποτε ὄν (ἔστω γὰρ λόγου χάριν τὸ τυχόν)· τοῦτο δ' εἰ μὴ τῷ

Here, in fact, Aristotle is applying the general principle regarding the error of judgment which consists in taking pleasure for a true good, and applying it specifically to the particular case wherein one makes a mistake concerning ‘principles of conduct’, that is, in the choice of the good major premise of a syllogism. Turning to the case of the akratic, we must thus say that the akratic’s error consists precisely in not ‘seeing’ the principle of his action, again, the good major premise of his syllogism, or to define it more exactly, not using that premise in a particular case, thus not subsuming this particular case under that good maxim. In short, this onset of *epithumia* prevents the akratic from using his ethically good practical knowledge, and prevents him from representing the cake to himself as a bad thing which he must avoid; and thus no *boulêsis* is sustained which could make him abstain from eating the cake. The comparison of the excellent man with the healthy man, and the comparison of the many with the sick, is found also *mutatis mutandis* in our text on *akrasia*: the akratic, affected by appetite, is like a madman, a drunk, or a sleeping person, whose bodies are altered. Since representation, as a sensitive faculty, depends upon the bodily state of the sensitive organs, we can understand why these bodily alterations can affect it. These various comparisons are intended to make us understand why the akratic is incapable of making use of his faculty of representation of the deliberative type. Just as the sleeper or the madman are incapable of using their knowledge because of an alteration in their faculties, the akratic is incapable of using his practical knowledge, more exactly incapable of putting his *phantasia logistikê* to work. Aristotle says this explicitly in lines 1147b6–9: just as the drunk must sleep off his drink, just as the sleeper must awaken, in order to recover the ability to use their knowledge, it is only when the akratic has regained his normal state that he will be able once again to use his practical knowledge and put into operation his *phantasia logistikê*.

I think the distinction between the enkratic and the akratic can corroborate this. How can we explain, in fact, that a temperate man, the enkratic, is able to resist the blandishments of his *epithumia*? Aristotle repeats that the enkratic is more able to obey his reason, because he remains ‘unshakable under the attack of passion and appetite’ (1151b8–9). The akratic is like someone who gets drunk quickly (1151a3–5), while the

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ἀγαθῷ, οὐ φαίνεται· διαστρέφει γὰρ ἡ μοχθηρία καὶ διαψεύδεσθαι ποιεῖ περὶ τὰς πρακτικὰς ἀρχάς.

enkratic, if we continue with this analogy, is like someone who can drink a lot without getting drunk. In short, the enkratic doesn't lose the use of his *phantasia logistikê* when he is overtaken by his *epithumia*. But thanks to what? Would we say that the akratic possessed a practical knowledge which was less certain,<sup>21</sup> or is it that he encounters a stronger *epithumia*?<sup>22</sup> But Aristotle doesn't answer in that way. On the contrary, he insists on the fact that the enkratic also is subject to strong waves of *epithumia*. And he repeats that the akratic, like the enkratic, is distinguished from the intemperate man, since both of them have their practical knowledge intact. The answer to this question is to be found, in my opinion, at the end of his analysis of *akrasia*. There Aristotle says that *akrasia* is finally a bundle of bad habits, and one must be able to change these habits if one wishes to cure this defect. This is a more difficult piece of work than that which is required to cure impetuous *akrasia*, for which an intellectual cure can suffice, but it is still possible according to Aristotle, while it remains no doubt impossible to cure a really intemperate man whose bad character has become a true nature, rebelling against any outside intervention. But what do they really consist of, these bad habits, this deficient character? Aristotle tells us several lines above, in comparing the akratic, the enkratic, and the 'insensible' man: 'the akratic man doesn't persist in (trying to follow) the rule because he loves the pleasures of the body too much' (1151b25–26), while the enkratic man does persist because he loves those pleasures in a more measured way. This distinction allows me to specify what I have already said: in the end, the cause of the exercise of the *phantasia aisthetikê* which presents the cake to the akratic as pleasant is the pleasure taken in an habitual way in one's appetites and in their objects. It is a bad habit (because it isn't measured or proportionate) to take pleasure in objects such as this, which in a way which is undoubtedly systematic makes the akratic lose the ability to use his faculty of *phantasia logistikê*, and leaves him only capable of using his faculty of *phantasia aisthetikê*.

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<sup>21</sup> Irwin (1988) and Mele (1981) think this knowledge is, finally, a knowledge of happiness, and they present the akratic as someone who has variable concepts of happiness.

<sup>22</sup> Bodéüs (2004), 363, n. 1.

2. *Some difficulties considered*

I would now like to analyse three series of texts which appear to run counter to my interpretation, and thus specify certain points in my interpretation.

It is true that the akratic appears to reach a conclusion to the first syllogism: ‘reason says to flee from this’ (1147a34). But is this really a conclusion? At first sight, the intellectualist interpretation has a very strong argument in the proposition at 1147a33: ‘this is sweet (this proposition is active)’. If we maintain that there are two syllogisms in Aristotle’s example, and that hence there are two major premises, the proposition that is active is then the minor premise ‘this is sweet’, and since this minor premise is common to the major premises in competition, we have to conclude that the akratic, at the very moment of his *akrasia*, has drawn two contrary conclusions: ‘eat this sweet’ and ‘do not eat this sweet’. But then why does the akratic obey the second injunction and not the first? Because, the non-intellectualist interpreter will answer, either the akratic doesn’t possess the conclusion (as Aristotle says of the *teleutaia protasis* at 1147b9–10), or else he possesses it and hence only recites it like a drunk reciting verses of Empedocles (1147b12). On the contrary, if, (based on the arguments I have summoned), we interpret the *teleutaia protasis* as signifying the minor premise, and not the conclusion, the reader of this text has, I think, the answer to the question the text asks: if the akratic has a conclusion that is useless in reality, it’s in fact because he doesn’t possess the minor in an active way. We must conclude that the proposition of our line 1147a34 is, in effect, only a quasi-conclusion. One can easily imagine the akratic saying ‘I cannot eat this cake’ at the very moment he opens his mouth to eat it. But such words would just be the effect of the minor premise ‘this is a cake’, but without realizing that ‘this cake’ is in reality a ‘cake which is to be avoided because it is not good for his health’. I agree in saying, with the non-intellectualist interpreter, that the akratic can say that ‘this is a cake that I cannot eat’, and the reason why he eats it is because he doesn’t feel the desire to abstain. But why doesn’t he feel that desire, that *boulêsis*, unlike the continent man? It seems to me that the only answer possible, in the context of the action theory as I have understood it, is precisely the one Aristotle gives in evoking the minor premise: it’s because the akratic doesn’t see, at the moment of the *akrasia*, that this cake is an unhealthy cake, because he fails to utilize his *phantasia logistikê*; he only utilizes his *phantasia aisthêtikê*, which makes

him see the cake as something pleasant and hence good to eat. The case of the akratic who says ‘I must not eat this cake’ is thus similar to the case of students at the beginning of their acquisition of a science or knowledge:

The fact that men utter scientific propositions is not at all a sign (that they possess knowledge): since those in the affective states mentioned, too, can utter demonstrative proofs and verses from Empedocles; and those who have just learned something for the first time can string the propositions together, but they still don’t possess the knowledge; they have to assimilate it, and that takes time. (1147a18–22)<sup>23</sup>

I think we have to take this verb, ‘string together’ (*suneirein*) in a fairly ironic sense: those beginning students are capable of reciting demonstrations, that is, of lining up a series of propositions, but they still don’t have any knowledge, not so much in the sense that they would not be able to understand the meaning of each proposition taken one by one, but in the sense that they would not grasp the connection which links each of the propositions together as a demonstration in a meaningful way. A student, in Aristotle’s time as in ours, can learn a mathematical demonstration by heart, without being able to derive it by repeating the inferences which give rise to the demonstration. The akratic is in the same position; he can in fact state or repeat a major premise, and can state a minor premise, and can even state a ‘conclusion’. But he will not really be concluding, in the sense of *sumperanthen*, a real putting together of several terms whose connection is really ‘grasped’ by the agent.

Finally, what about the proposition ‘this is sweet’, which is said ‘to be active’? It seems to me that the non-intellectualist interpretation, which interprets it as active in the two syllogisms, makes the mistake of taking it out of context. Yet it is difficult not to liken it, at once, to the lines that follow: 1147b10–12, and those that precede: 1147a7: ‘Whether this

<sup>23</sup> Τὸ δὲ λέγειν τοὺς λόγους τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπιστήμης οὐδὲν σημεῖον· καὶ γὰρ οἱ ἐν τοῖς πάθεσι τούτοις ὄντες ἀποδείξεις καὶ ἔπη λέγουσιν Ἐμπεδοκλέους, καὶ οἱ πρῶτον μαθόντες συνείρουσι μὲν τοὺς λόγους, ἴσασι δ’ οὕπω· δεῖ γὰρ συμφυῆναι, τοῦτο δὲ χρόνου δεῖται. Rowe, as well as Irwin, translates *logos* by ‘words’, probably because we can hardly say that Empedocles’ verses are arguments, in a very strong sense. But I believe that the example of the *prōton mathontes* is more general and must not mean the *mathontes* of Empedocles’ verses; and second, Empedocles’ verses are taken by Aristotle as an example of a difficult scientific text: it is because those verses are difficult that those *mathontes* need time to assimilate such knowledge, not because they are verses. For these two reasons I think ‘arguments’ is better than ‘words’ here.

is such-and-such—this is what the agent either doesn't have, or doesn't activate'. In fact, the expression 'this (proposition) is active' is visibly an insistence on Aristotle's part meaning: 'this proposition is actually active', which implies that there must be another proposition which is not. And what is not active, as these two other passages say, is precisely the minor premise. Of course this is not the simple proposition 'this is sweet', which would then be and not be active at the same moment. Thus it can only be this same proposition, not as such, but within one of the syllogisms. In the 'bad' syllogism, the proposition 'this is sweet and pleasant' is active; in the 'good' syllogism, 'this is sweet and unhealthy' is inactive, i.e. rendered inactive by the onset of *epithumia*.

There is nonetheless a second difficulty I will briefly respond to. At the end of the treatise on *akrasia*, Aristotle appears to affirm, contrary to the above, that the weak akratic acts 'contrary to his own choice' (*para prohairesin*) (1151a7), and that such people 'do not persist in what they have deliberated' (1150b20). Is Aristotle suggesting here another theory of *akrasia* besides the one he presented in chapter 3? Or is it my intellectualist reading which needs to be modified? I think, on the contrary, that we can perfectly well understand what is said in the framework of an intellectualist interpretation, such as that I have defended, while taking account of the general framework of a 'conciliatory' reading of Aristotle. If he decides to go back over the difference between the impetuous akratic and the weak akratic, it's because he wants to take into account the common opinion which sees in the phenomenon of the akratic someone who in fact 'doesn't stick to his decisions'. In this way Aristotle wishes to account for a phenomenon which no one would deny: I may eat this cake even though I have just decided not to.

It seems to me that Aristotle distinguishes two types of cases wherein one can in fact say that the akratic 'doesn't stick to his decisions', and that these cases don't call into question the intellectualist analysis I have defended. When he opposes the akratic and the *akolastos* in saying that the first 'acts against his *prohairesis*', whereas the second acts according to a bad *prohairesis*, Aristotle is referring to a general *prohairesis*, such as abstaining from sweets, and not to the particular decision of eating a given cake in front of me. On the contrary, when he opposes the weak akratic to the impetuous akratic, Aristotle underlines the fact that the first doesn't persist in what he has deliberated on, and hence in his particular resolution, whereas the second doesn't deliberate at all. The non-intellectualist interpreter sees therein confirmation of his interpretation, meaning that the weak akratic did indeed deliberate

and hence drew the conclusion of the ‘good’ syllogism, whereas the impetuous akratic hasn’t deliberated and hence hasn’t drawn that sort of ‘good’ conclusion. But that interpretation must suppose that there is no distinction of intention between these two types of texts, which seems quite dubious to me. In fact, if we take seriously the fact that in VII 3, we are dealing with a causal explanation which shows how and why the akratic fails to act in the sense of his ‘good’ major premise (and in the sense of his ‘good’ general resolution), we must hence understand that the *agnoia*, which takes place at the very moment of the *akrasia*, is the cause of the lack of rational desire to resist the attraction of the cake. It seems to me that this type of explanatory intention is lacking in the rest of book VII where Aristotle repeats that the weak akratic acts against his *prohairesis*. Hence I see no reason for not understanding these assertions as amounting to descriptions any observer might make: at moment t1, the person chooses not to eat this cake, but at moment t2, he has changed his mind and he eats the cake. At moment t1, the person ‘sees’ the cake as something unhealthy which shouldn’t be eaten; but at moment t2, because of his *epithumia*, this ‘vision’ alters and fades away, making room for the ‘vision’ of this same cake as something pleasant, and so good to eat.

There is finally a third difficulty I may respond to. There are at least two passages outside of *NE* where Aristotle undoubtedly supposes that the akratic, at the moment when he accomplishes his act, does indeed have a ‘representation’, or ‘consciousness’ of that act as something which ought not be done. The first passage is from the *Eudemian Ethics*, in which Aristotle compares the akratic to the enkratic, with, implicitly, the same type of example (eating the cake or not) as in our text, where the health of the agent is in question. Contrary to the way in which the enkratic rejoices in the pleasure which good health will bring him after he refrains from eating the cake, the akratic ‘feels the pain which lies in the future, and understands that he will be in bad health’ (II 8, 1224b19–21). It may be true that the desire to abstain from eating the cake is stimulated by the *phantasia logistikē* which represents, to the eyes of the enkratic, the harm which the cake will do him, and thus the joy of not eating it, and this must also be true for the akratic to the extent that he can already feel the pain which eating the cake will cause: he also has a certain *phantasia logistikē* which presents the fact of eating the cake to him as harmful to his health; as Aristotle explicitly says, he is clearly conscious, at the moment when he eats the cake, that his health will suffer.

The second passage is the well known text from *DA*, where Aristotle presents *akrasia* to us not as a conflict between reason and desire, but indeed between two forms of desire, *epithumia* and *boulêsis*: ‘a desire wins out over another desire, when there is *akrasia*’ (III 11, 434a14). This supposes that in this case as well the akratic has put his *phantasia logistikê* into operation, because there is a *boulêsis* indeed present, confronted by an *epithumia*. Undoubtedly, Aristotle gives us here a version which is rather different from that which we found in *NE* VII 3, at least as interpreted by me.

Yet I don’t think that we can speak here of an incompatibility between these two versions, nor that our *NE* passage would only concern a phenomenon of weak *akrasia*, whereas these would be more aimed at a ‘strong’ *akrasia* (or what is usually called clear-eyed *akrasia*).<sup>24</sup>

In the *DA* passage, the idea of a victory of one desire over another implies that one of these two desires is stronger than the other. Yet if my explanation of the cause of desire is correct, it is thus the ‘stronger’ representation, that is, the clearest, which wins out: the akratic is the one for whom the *phantasia aisthêtikê* is the stronger, the enkratic the one for whom the *phantasia logistikê* is the stronger or the clearer. And this is precisely because the first is more in the habit than the second of enjoying bodily pleasure. The relative force of pleasure is what the akratic feels, as compared to the pleasure which determines that of his *phantasia logistikê*.

I therefore believe that we needn’t set two types of akratic in opposition, but we can determine degrees of *akrasia*, in the same way that the distinction between *enkrateia* and *akrasia* turns out to be a matter of degree, and not a difference of nature. In this way there are akratics who have no *phantasia logistikê* and others who do have one, but one which is too weak (in contrast with the situation of the enkratic) to resist the blandishments of passion. But shall we say that the first have been described in chapter VII, iii/5 of the *NE*, while the others are described in passages of *DA* and *EE*? This is fairly doubtful, to the extent that these two text locations are not intended to define or describe the behavior of the akratic, while the text of *NE* has the purpose of explaining how *akrasia* is produced, without appealing to the sort of distinction of degrees in *akrasia* mentioned just now. I think therefore it is proper that we understand the explanation of the cause

<sup>24</sup> As forcefully defended by Scaltsas (1989).



of *akrasia* described in *NE* VII 3 as the explanation which also holds for the cases described above, even if these cases oblige us to modify (slightly) the explanation. We will thus say that in fact the general cause of *akrasia* is a lack of *phantasia logistikê*, and depending on the case this lack may be partial or total.

I think this reading can be confirmed in the following way. We can in fact imagine an akratic who accomplishes at one and the same time two courses of deliberation, which end up reaching opposed conclusions—one the decision to eat the cake, and one the decision not to eat the cake. But how are we to explain that someone follows the conclusion of the first course of action and not the second, except by saying that the second decision was not forceful enough to get itself carried out? But if it didn't have enough force, this is due to a lack of *phantasia logistikê*, the evidentiary character of which failed to carry the day. The akratic is compared to a sleeper, a madman, and a drunk. But one can be in all these states to a greater or lesser degree. The akratic might be just a little tipsy, and have a certain representation of the cake as bad for his health. Or he might be very drunk, and thus fail completely to exercise his power of *phantasia logistikê*. Still, these two cases, like all the intermediate cases, have one single explanation: it is a greater or lesser lack of this *phantasia* which is the cause of the greater or lesser lack of rational desire to refrain from eating the cake.

One last objection might be to say that Aristotle failed to imagine the case of an akratic who eats the cake, and is clearly conscious of doing wrong, knowing this in as effective a way as possible. But I don't think Aristotle would have called that a case of *akrasia*. In this example, someone eats something forbidden which brings pleasure, which is exactly what we call perversity; a perverse person derives pleasure from doing things he knows quite well are bad and non-desirable at the moment he does them. Aristotle didn't describe this kind of fault, but I think it certain that he would have classed such persons as intemperate, not akratic.

*Conclusion: how Socratic does Aristotle remain?*

In concluding, I would like to return to the precise connection between Socrates and Aristotle. The end of chapter iii/5 contains an explicit mention of Socrates. I translate the manuscript version as edited by Bywater (following the text given by all our mss):

And because the last premise is not universal and doesn't seem to express systematic knowledge in the way the universal premise does, it appears that the result that Socrates was looking for eventually eventuates: this pathos (= *akrasia*) doesn't occur in the presence of what seems to be knowledge in the primary sense, and it isn't this that is 'dragged around' by the *pathos* (= *epithumia*), but (it occurs in the presence of) a perceptive (knowledge). (1147b13–17)<sup>25</sup>

Most interpreters accept Stewart's correction (which emends *parouses gignetai to pathos as periginetai to pathos*)<sup>26</sup> because it is totally unlikely that Aristotle would have wanted to say, contrary to his entire procedure, that the akratic, at the moment of the *akrasia*, does not, or no longer, possess the major premise, which Aristotle calls here 'science in the proper sense' (since science bears on universal terms).<sup>27</sup> Yet, in my opinion, there is no good reason of a philological type, meaning independently of interpretation, to amend this text which seems to have posed no problem in the manuscript tradition (and which is perfectly attested to among Greek and Latin commentators). Short of wanting to correct the text where the interpretation has problems, I think that the text should be conserved. But in fact I don't believe it to be as problematic as it might appear at first sight. Here again we have to read this text vis-à-vis the passage it responds to, i.e. the presentation of the *aporia* of which this whole part of book VII, up to our debated lines, are the denouement to:

Well, some deny that it is possible to do so if one has knowledge: it would be an astonishing thing, Socrates used to think, if, when knowledge is in us, something else overpowers it and drags it about like a slave. (1145b21–24)<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ καθόλου μὴδ' ἐπιστημονικὸν ὁμοίως εἶναι δοκεῖν τῷ καθόλου τὸν ἔσχατον ὅρον καὶ ἔοικεν ὁ ἐξήτει Σωκράτης συμβαίνειν· οὐ γὰρ τῆς κυρίως ἐπιστήμης εἶναι δοκούσης παρούσης γίνεται τὸ πάθος, οὐδ' αὕτη περιέλεται διὰ τὸ πάθος, ἀλλὰ τῆς αἰσθητικῆς.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Rowe who translates: 'for it is not what seems to be knowledge in the primary sense that the affective state in question overcomes (nor is it this kind of knowledge that is 'dragged about' because of the state), but the perceptual kind'.

<sup>27</sup> An other reason for emending our text is that Aristotle would be then using the word '*pathos*' with different meanings in the same sentence. But I do not think that it is as strange as it appears, since Aristotle constantly uses that word with these two different meanings throughout book VII.

<sup>28</sup> Ἐπιστάμενον μὲν οὖν οὐ φασὶ τινες οἷόν τε εἶναι· δεινὸν γὰρ ἐπιστήμης ἐνούσης, ὥς ἔφετο Σωκράτης, ἄλλο τι κρατεῖν καὶ περιέλεειν αὐτὴν ὥσπερ ἀνδράποδον.

As Aristotle explains in the lines which follow, Socrates in fact thinks that *akrasia* is impossible to the extent that every man act according to what he believes to be best, hence according to knowledge of the good, or what he thinks it is good for him at the moment he acts. If we define *akrasia* as loss of the ability to know, then *akrasia* is impossible since every man acts according to his knowledge at the moment. At the moment the person Aristotle calls the 'akratic' eats the cake, he thinks, or has the knowledge (even if that knowledge is false knowledge), that that cake is good for him; he doesn't commit an act of *akrasia*, but an act of ignorance, because he doesn't know at that time that eating cake is in reality an evil for him.

But then what exactly does Aristotle admit in this explanation? That there is indeed an act of ignorance at the moment of eating the cake. But that, contrary to what Socrates thinks (at least as Aristotle interprets him), that ignorance doesn't bear on general knowledge, or on the major premise, but only on a particular knowledge. Socrates seems to think, according to Aristotle, that he who eats the cake has a change of opinion: he no longer thinks, now, that eating cake is bad. He thus now ignores that eating cake is bad. Aristotle, on the contrary, insists throughout his presentation of *akrasia* in book VII on the fact that the akratic knows perfectly well the general rule forbidding him from eating cake (or at least too much cake), unlike the *akolastos* who doesn't know the rule. In other words, the ignorance bears on another spot: the minor premise, as I have tried to show.

Still comparing the two passages demands a supplementary explanation, for, evidently, if Aristotle takes up the same terms that Socrates used in the *Protagoras*, it isn't exactly with the same meaning. In fact, as Aristotle recalls in the first passage (1145b23–25), when Socrates says that knowledge cannot be dragged about like a slave, we are led to think that we are talking about any knowledge; what Socrates wants to say is that we cannot act without having a certain knowledge: it's because I know, whatever be the sense of 'know' here, that eating cake is bad that I don't eat any; and it's because I now know, for I have changed my mind, that eating some is good, that I eat some. So saying that knowledge can be dragged about is something 'astonishing' or 'absurd', for being altogether paradoxical! On the contrary, in the second passage (1147b13–17), when Aristotle tells us that knowledge cannot be dragged about he doesn't mean any knowledge whatever, and hence doesn't intend to say that such a description of the fault as a knowledge's lack of power would paradoxical, but he means general

knowledge, the universal premise, and he wants to say that this description corresponds to the definition of what it is to 'be akratic' as opposed to 'being *akolastos*'. In other words, Aristotle recognizes that Socrates is right in talking about ignorance in the case of an ethical fault, but wrong in believing that that ignorance bears on general knowledge. And he recognizes that Socrates is right in talking about 'invincible knowledge', but here we have to be talking about general knowledge: the akratic is characterized by the fact that he doesn't lose this type of knowledge. Should he lose it, he would become an *akolastos*.

This said, how are we now to interpret the assertion stating that '*akrasia* doesn't occur in the presence of knowledge in the proper sense (i.e. general knowledge, or the universal premise)'? At first glance, I reiterate, this seems to contradict everything that Aristotle has defended so far, precisely because the akratic has this general knowledge firmly in mind! But if we read it as an answer to our first passage, I think we have to read it as quite simply wanting to say that the ignorance *akrasia* consists in doesn't occur in the area of universal knowledge. My interpretation of this point doesn't differ from Stewart's, but I don't think that we need to correct the received text to understand it this way.

Does Aristotle remain Socratic despite everything? Certainly not, to the extent that he (in contrast to Socrates) doesn't consider the akratic's ignorance as the final cause of his bad choice; that ignorance is only a description of the non-use of a practical knowledge. The cause of that non-use or that ignorance is of course *epithumia*, and the cause of that *epithumia*, which manages to reverse sensible knowledge is in turn the akratic's bad habits. These are two causes Socrates didn't see, as Aristotle repeats throughout *NE* and *EE*, since he, Socrates, believed that intelligence alone could make us ethically good.

If my interpretation of this chapter is correct, Aristotle thus did what he had promised to do, and did so according to the method he described at the beginning of Book VII. He admits, with Socrates, that there is ignorance in the phenomenon of *akrasia*, but he then needs to specify the nature of that ignorance, and where it occurs: that ignorance mustn't be understood in an absolute sense, as the loss of some knowledge; that ignorance doesn't concern the major premise, but rather the minor. Aristotle also accepts the commonsense view, which sees *akrasia* as a defect in the will, or in what Aristotle calls rational desire, which is in fact beaten down or obscured by an irrational desire which is stronger; he accepts also the common view that the akratic isn't ignorant of the fact that what he is doing is bad. But again it is necessary to specify:

the will is weak or non-existent in this case because the representation of the piece of cake as something bad to be avoided is lacking or is too weak. The akratic does have a certain consciousness of the fact that what he is doing is bad, but that proves to be merely a very vague one, not based on a clear *phantasia logistikê*.



## AKRASIA AND THE METHOD OF ETHICS\*

MARCO ZINGANO

The discussion of the phenomenon of *akrasia* carried on by Aristotle displays, as one knows, several difficulties, which have caused reiterated debates amongst contemporary interpreters. These controversies are not just concerned to side issues, but they touch, as it turns out, central issues. In this essay I shall focus my attention on an issue that is mainly a methodological one. My main interest is to understand the role that the Socratic thesis plays in Aristotle's discussion of the topic. It still is an issue of debate what Aristotle's position regarding the Socratic doctrine exactly is: does he simply expose it, or does he adopt it—and, in the latter case, up to what extent? There is place, however, for a more initial, and stronger, astonishment: why does Aristotle busy himself with it at all? After all, Socrates denied altogether the possibility of the weakness of will, and Aristotle not only wants to tackle this problem in a dialectical context in which *akrasia* is, on the contrary, taken as existent (so that the Socratic thesis is seen as something clearly opposed to the accepted opinions), but he has also a much more natural explanation of it, *i.e.* an explanation in terms of a conflict between reason and affection (*pathos*), which can be expressed regardless of Socrates' thesis and in fact is conceived of as opposed to the Socratic intellectualism. My main point is rather methodological, and a preliminary one, but it seems to me to be crucial in order to decide what is Aristotle's own thesis: what role does Socrates' position play in the Aristotelian investigation on the nature of *akrasia*?

### 1. *Akrasia as a practical conflict between reason and appetite*

To begin with, one should note that the phenomenon of the weakness of will does not offer any great difficulty to the Aristotelian perspective. As Aristotle conceives the action to be in the intersection of two

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distinct faculties, the rational (practical) one and the irrational part of the soul that is able to consider reason, *akrasia* explains itself naturally as a conflict between what the agent knows (on a practical standpoint) and what he desires at a certain moment, or, more precisely, what he has an appetite (*epithumia*) for. I may know that smoking is harmful to health and, nevertheless, I may wish to smoke a cigarette; in this conflict between practical reason and appetite, now one course of action imposes itself and now another, leading the agent in one or another direction: the agent may smoke, if the appetite prevails, or he can avoid smoking, if he has got the strength of will commanded by the practical reason. Apparently, there is nothing mysterious here. It could be argued that human action ought not to be thought as a conflict between appetite and practical reason; however, if the action is so considered—and Aristotle seems to have considered it as such—the phenomenon of *akrasia* naturally explains itself in the intersection of those two faculties. It is worth noticing that in saying so, one does not claim the *necessity* or *inevitability* of the conflict, but only its *possibility*; the desire can be in intimate harmony with practical reason, so that the agent acts without any conflict, but there can also be a disharmony between appetite and practical reason, so that the subject acts under the mark of the conflict.

According to Socrates, however, the possibility of a conflict between reason and emotion does not properly describe what happens within human action. In the Socratic perspective, explaining an action requires referring exclusively to the subject's beliefs. Perhaps beliefs are in some way linked (furthered, thwarted etc.) to pleasure and emotions in general; notwithstanding, action is governed by the beliefs the agent has in the moment he acts, so that it can be treated under a mere epistemic perspective. According to this perspective, one who *knows* acts well: knowledge is a sufficient condition for the good action. Obviously, the knowledge here referred to is not the *theoretical* knowledge, but it is the *moral* knowledge, the knowledge of all good and evil involved in practical matters.<sup>1</sup> This moral knowledge has a privileged role in

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<sup>1</sup> In *Laches* 193c, the going down into a well without knowing is seen as something courageous, whilst the going down with knowledge is disqualified; in *Prot.* 350a–e it is said that who goes down into a well with knowledge is bolder and *eo ipso* more courageous than who goes down without knowledge. The use of the very same example to illustrate opposite cases may be surprising at first glance, but one should notice that, in *Laches*, the referred knowledge is clearly described as only a technical or theoretical knowledge (*cf.* the knowledge of the soldier in 193a), while the knowledge to which



explaining the connection of the cardinal virtues, for it has a causal function concerning to the presence of the other virtues.<sup>2</sup> One who is courageous is temperate, just and wise, but one is courageous, just and temperate because one has got the relevant knowledge. And, as the good action is, at last, assimilated to the moral knowledge, so the bad action is assimilated to ignorance: it is because the agent has a false belief in what is good or profitable for himself that he acts mistakenly. Two corollaries are drawn from this set of theses on action. Firstly, there is no voluntarily bad action.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the possibility of *akrasia* is denied, for one who has knowledge will not be defeated by anything else.<sup>4</sup> The reasoning is presented in the final part of the *Protagoras*, in the fourth argument that Socrates elaborates to sustain the unity of virtues. This

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Socrates refers in the *Prot.* is indistinctly theoretical and practical, which let Socrates sustain his point, for he considers it to be above all *moral* knowledge; Laches, however, in the homonymous dialogue, does not take heed of the problem, which will be exposed only through Nicias in the second part of that dialogue, and Nicias clearly takes the knowledge in question to be above all *moral* knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding to the connection of the virtues in Socrates, the thesis of the biconditionality, upheld especially by Vlastos (1973), 221–269, does not seem to take heed of this essential aspect of the Socratic doctrine, that is, an asymmetry between science in one part and justice, courage and temperance in another: someone who has got one virtue has all virtues, but one is virtuous *because of* the moral science one has. The thesis of the identity of all virtues as (moral) knowledge seems to apprehend more properly what Socrates upholds, with the restriction that the other virtues are defined by adding to the science the field which it is applied to. For instance, courage is defined as the science of what one should or should not fear (*Laches*, 194e11–95 a1; a similar definition is used in an argument in *Prot.* 360d; cf. *Rep.* IV 430b2–4), that is, it is the moral science applied to a certain field, the one made up by what can cause the death of the agent. Some similar additions must be made to the definition of justice, which concerns to the commerce among men (and, when piety is included, also with the gods: piety is defined in *Euthyphro* 12e as that part of justice that is related to the service of the gods) and temperance (regarding to the pleasures). Thus, a simple synonymous thesis is not enough either, for the virtues differ in a relevant way due to the additions they contain in their definitions, although, in a basic sense, all virtue is knowledge or science (this science is one and the same knowledge for all: cf. *Laches* 198d6).

<sup>3</sup> *Prot.* 358c5–d2. And so there is an asymmetry, pointed out by Aristotle, between virtue and vice: the former is voluntary, the second involuntary. And it is involuntary because, according to the Socratic perspective, it is grounded on an ignorance (that is, the agent has a false belief on which he grounds his search of what he thinks is the best for him, but which actually is bad). Now, as the involuntary act is that act whose principle is outside the agent or an act of which the agent is ignorant, the action would be involuntary, for it fulfils the last requirement. However, it has still to be proved that whatever sort of ignorance causes the involuntary character of the action, what is refused once more by Aristotle (the ignorance that provokes the involuntary is only the ignorance of the circumstances under which the action occurs, it is certainly not the general ignorance or the ignorance of the good: cf. *NE* III 1).

<sup>4</sup> *Prot.* 352b–c; Aristotle repeats almost literally 352c1–2 in *NE* VII 2, 1145b24.

fourth argument operates with a hedonist premise (the good is pleasure), which renders it more complex and even controversial, but one should remark that, differently from the three other arguments of the same dialogue, in this final argument Socrates and Protagoras get together so that they examine the belief of the majority according to which one can be defeated by pleasure. According to the majority's belief, one could act badly in spite of knowing the good. Taking for granted the hedonist premise, Socrates shows, however, that, inevitably, such a belief is incoherent, for it leads one to say that 'I know that A pleases (= is good), but I do  $\neg A$ , for I am defeated by pleasure'. Whatever Socrates' position might be concerning to the premises that are used, the reasoning aims at the interdiction of the phenomenon of *akrasia* even within a discourse that intends to be able to refer to the notion of 'being defeated by pleasure'.

Aristotle's diagnosis of what generates in Socrates' position these clearly controversial theses is very accurate: Socrates was, on one hand, right, as he noticed the role of (practical) reason in the determination of the right action, but, on the other hand, he was wrong, as he assimilates the virtues to reasons or science.<sup>5</sup> And Aristotle's solution is also very clear: action must be conceived of in the intersection of two distinct faculties, (practical) reason and emotion (or affection), with no assimilation of one to another. In this sense, *akrasia* is thought of as occurring in the very place where emerges a conflict between what reason acknowledges as being good (and must be done) and what desire wants at that moment. More precisely, it is a conflict between what the practical reason takes to be the object of pursuit or avoidance and the desire of what is pleasant, the *epithumia* (here translated by *appetite*). There is still a further (although minor) restriction, according to Aristotle: *akrasia* is not only a conflict between (practical) reason and appetite, but also the *epithumia* involved is directly connected to the senses of touch and taste. Thus Aristotle presents himself contrary to the application of the notion of *akrasia* to cases in which reason is in conflict with honour or money or *thumos*,<sup>6</sup> restricting it to appetites

<sup>5</sup> See especially *NE* VI 13, 1144b17–30; *MM* I 1, 1182a15–23; 34, 1198a10–23; on courage see *NE* III 8, 1116b3–23 and *MM* I 20, 1190b21–33.

<sup>6</sup> The problem of knowing whether there is *akrasia* in case of anger, honour and money is mentioned in *NE* VII 1, 1145b19–20, the last of the opinions listed from 1145b8 on; it is solved in 4 1147b35 by the notion of resemblance, for all these cases are said *akrasia* only *by resemblance*, καθ' ὁμοιότητα (the same in 1148b13, 1149a3; κατὰ μεταφοράν is used in 5, 1149a23).

connected to pleasures of touch and taste. Typical cases of appetite involved in *akrasia* are, then, sexual attraction, eating and drinking, for they are all directly connected to the senses of touch or taste.

Several passages within and outside the ethical treatises give such an answer concerning to the weakness of will. In the *De Anima*, Aristotle generally presents *akrasia* as a conflict within which one desire pushes another, like one sphere that pushes another (III 11, 434a14). This passage clearly uses terms of conflict (see 434a12–13: ‘a[n irrational] desire overcomes a rational desire’). In *DA* III 9, just after emphasizing that only the practical intellect moves (and not the theoretical intellect), Aristotle says, expressly referring to *akrasia*, that the practical intellect may not lead to action if there is a conflict with an appetite: ‘further, even when intellect does command and thought bids us pursue or avoid something, sometimes no movement is produced, but one acts in accordance with appetite, as in the case of the acratice men’ (433a1–3).<sup>7</sup> Again, at the basis of the phenomenon of *akrasia* there is very clearly a conflict, more precisely: the conflict between what reason commands and what the appetite wants at the moment, or, as Aristotle writes a little later, a conflict that occurs when reason and appetites are contrary (III 10, 433b6–7). The same lesson applies to the ethical treatises. In the passages in which he does not treat *akrasia ex professo*, Aristotle emphatically highlights the conflict: it is obvious that there is something in the acratice that is different from reason, something that fights against reason (*NE* I 13, 1102b14–18); the impulses of the acratice are contrary to reason (1102b21); the acratice acts under the influence of appetite, but not with deliberative reason (*NE* III 2, 1111b13–14); the acratice is the one who acts by appetite against reason (*EE* II 7, 1223a37–38), he commits an injustice as he acts by appetite (1223b1); it is possible to think and have appetite for contrary things, as it happens with the acratice (*EE* VII 7, 1241a19–20). When he examines *ex professo* the theme (*NE* VII = *EE* VI), the same aspect is emphasised. When Aristotle approaches the phenomenon of *akrasia* in a *phusikós* perspective, the *scientific* perspective (VII 3, 1147a24–b9), there is a first reasoning, whose premises are *one should avoid to eat what is sweet and this is sweet*, which leads to the conclusion that *one should avoid this*, but it happens to be present an appetite, and this appetite, naturally inclined to the

<sup>7</sup> Ὅτι καὶ ἐπιτάττοντος τοῦ νοῦ καὶ λεγούσης τῆς διανοίας φεύγειν τι ἢ διώκειν οὐ κινεῖται, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν πράττει, οἷον οἱ ἀκρατεῖς.

pleasant, commands the action in the other direction, so that the agent pursues the sweet. Aristotle writes: ‘and <when> there happens to be appetite in the agent, then the first one says ‘avoid this’, but the appetite drives him to it’ (1147a33–34).<sup>8</sup> This is a neat expression of the conflict between a prescription of (practical) reason and the desire of the pleasant. More clearly, the akratic is described as follows: ‘there is a sort of man who is carried away as a result of passion and contrary to the right reason—a man whom passions masters so that he does not act according to the right reason, but does not master to the extent of making him ready to believe that he ought to pursue such pleasures without reserve; this is the akratic man’ (8, 1151a20–24).<sup>9</sup> Once again, the language of conflict is remarkable.

It would not be amiss to say that this conflict is not the opposition between something that is rational and something that is completely irrational, as if appetites were not wrapped up in propositional terms. Aristotle presents the appetites as irrational desires in the sense that those appetites are grounded on the sensation of pleasure and displeasure. Appetites, as well as the *thumos*, also occur, therefore, in other animals, which have sensation but no reason; opposed to them, what reason commands is something proper to man. Notwithstanding, human appetites, yet been created with the sensation of pleasure and pain, are fit to the propositional expression and, therefore, to the rational expression of every human desire. The passage from *NE* quoted above is clear about it. The appetite is in conflict with the right reason, which bids us to avoid sweet things; yet the appetite makes the agent act in the opposite direction *by taking* the premise *all sweets are pleasant*, which, together with the second premise *this is sweet*, leads to the opinion, which functions as a conclusion, that *this is pleasant*, therefore that it is an object to be pursued. This is not raw affection; it is an elaborated practical syllogism. It is worth noticing that, as Aristotle himself writes, the akratic man behaves by reason (in a certain way) and opinion (1147a35–b).<sup>10</sup> He behaves *in a certain way* by reason because his alleged

<sup>8</sup> Ὅταν τύχη δ’ ἐπιθυμία ἐνοῦσα, ἥ μὲν οὖν λέγει φεύγειν τοῦτο, ἡ δ’ ἐπιθυμία ἄγει.

<sup>9</sup> Ἔστι δέ τις διὰ πάθος ἐκστατικός παρὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον, ὃν ὥστε μὲν μὴ πράττειν κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον κρατεῖ τὸ πάθος, ὥστε δ’ εἶναι τοιοῦτον οἷον πεπεῖσθαι διώκειν ἀνέδην δεῖν τὰς τοιαύτας ἡδονὰς οὐ κρατεῖ· οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀκρατής.

<sup>10</sup> Ὡστε συμβαίνει ὑπὸ λόγου πως καὶ δόξης ἀκρατεῦσθαι.

reason is what is opposite (although incidentally) to the right reason, therefore, in these circumstances, it is a false opinion. What is decisive, however, is that it obviously is an opinion, a *doxa*, typically expressed in propositions, very different, thereupon, from the mere irruption of an element thoroughly averse to reason.

Let me insist on just one more point that is very important indeed, in my opinion, for a deeper grasp of what is going on in Aristotle's treatment of *akrasia* in *NE* VII. It is pretty clear from some of the passages quoted above that the conflict is composed by two opposed and *complete* sides. On the one hand, we have a practical reasoning, with all its pieces. I mean, the conclusion is clearly recognized as such. As one can see from *DA* III 9, 433a1–3, practical reason commands us to pursue or avoid something, that is, *it clearly states the conclusion of its reasoning*. It not only has the premises, it also has the conclusion as such. The same point comes out in *NE* VII 3, 1147a33–34: as Aristotle writes here, practical reason forbids us to pursue something, that is, it asserts the conclusion of a reasoning as an interdiction of a certain pursuit. Stating the conclusion of a practical reasoning as such means that its practical aspect (the fact that you ought to do it) is not ignored. Why then the agent does not act accordingly? Because, on the other hand, there is another chain of propositions, this time governed by appetite, which is stronger in its desiderative aspect and pushes the agent towards its direction. It is important to see that, in being so pushed, the agent fully knows during his action that he ought not to do what he is doing. This is crucial for taking seriously the phenomenon of *akrasia*: we know at the moment we are acting that we ought not to do it. Aristotle recognizes this central feature of *akrasia* precisely when he thinks it as a conflict between reason and appetite. Both have practical aspects, and, as kinds of desire, they are more or less intense, and this intensity has a role to play in accounting for which one will win. But it is not only a question of intensity. Such a conflict, Aristotle carries on, requires perception of time, for the (practical) thought bids us to hold back for the sake of the future, whilst the appetite is influenced by what is just at hand, for what is pleasant here and now seems to be absolutely pleasant and good because one does not consider the future (*DA* III 10 433b8–10). There is also a conflict between what is at hand and what is far away. And, during this conflict, we cannot help having a perturbing glimpse of our own practical nature.

## 2. *Saving Socrates' thesis on the impossibility of akrasia*

I can now formulate the problem to which I would like to give some clues to the finding out of its solution. The phenomenon of *akrasia* does not seem to present unsurmountable difficulties, as it is thought of as a conflict between what reason bids and that thing which appetites pursues. Why then, when Aristotle examines *akrasia*, in book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he begins by adopting a perspective that is strongly imbued with the Socratic perspective, according to which such a phenomenon is a problem whose solution cannot be found except by its denial? In order to find the clues I want, I shall first show that Aristotle not only exposes, but also seems to adopt a Socratic perspective, and this happens already in the very formulation of the issue that is to be discussed. Secondly, I would like to examine some of the strategies Aristotle uses to defend or at least to keep himself close to Socrates. In doing so, I will be forced to reconsider some of the discussions on the use of the syllogism in practical matters. Finally, I will suggest some ways of explaining why Aristotle attempted to get so close to the Socratic perspective, although he had apparently good reasons to abandon the Socratic intellectualism without more ado.

Initially, it is necessary to show that Aristotle's analysis is strongly influenced by the Socratic perspective. My answer to that will be doubly positive: it is not just that Aristotle seems to follow Socrates' steps in his solution, but he also deliberately expresses the question in a way that favours it, or at least is not hostile to Socrates intentions. Let us start by the last point. The *aporia* that opens chapter VII 2 and that, in a certain sense, governs the whole of the investigation, is formulated in Greek as follows: *pôs hupolambanôn orthôs akrateuetai tis* (1145b21–22). It is possible to interpret it in two ways.<sup>11</sup> According to a first interpretation, the question asks for the very possibility of *akrasia* (and its possible descriptions), the referred knowledge being granted without discussion. In this case, if the phenomenon is taken to be existent, under a certain description, it has to occur in the presence of the complete knowledge. Now, since Aristotle admits its existence (under a certain description), his perspective should lead to a direction frankly opposed to that of Socrates, for knowledge, then, in some sense, will be dragged about by another thing, what Socrates categorically denied. In Greek, in order to

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<sup>11</sup> This topic was very well presented by Hardie (1980), 258–293.

avoid any syntactic ambiguity, it would be something like *pôs akrateuetai tis*, *hupolambanôn orthôs*, where the *pôs* is clearly linked to *akrateuetai tis*. This could be rendered as: ‘the knowledge being present, may a person succumb by *akrasia*?’ If the answer is yes, the Socratic perspective turns to be untenable; if it is no, there is no object to be searched, so there is no reason for such an inquiry.

However, this is not the syntax Aristotle observed when he formulated the aporia. As a matter of fact, he makes the question on the sort of knowledge rather than on the existence (or non-existence) of such a phenomenon: what sort of knowledge the agent has when he succumbs by *akrasia*? In Greek, the *pôs* is connected to *hupolambanôn orthôs* rather than to *akrateuetai tis*, what could be rendered by: ‘what sort of right knowledge one has when one succumbs by *akrasia*?’. That this is the Aristotelian syntax may be shown by the fact that, when Aristotle reconsiders the aporia, he formulates it not as the problem of determining whether someone succumbs when he has complete knowledge or not, but in what sense he knows when he is acting by *akrasia* (1146b9: *pôs eidotes*). In such a formulation, the question is not at first hostile to the Socratic intentions; on the contrary, a possible answer is that, in a certain sense, it is not knowledge itself that is dragged about by appetite, but *akrasia* occurs when the particular knowledge either is not present, or it is present in a manner similar to a drunkard uttering the verses of Empedocles. Such a solution is compatible with the Socratic project, for the particular knowledge is not identified to what is properly knowledge, since properly knowledge is concerned with what is more universal.

Let me now move to the second part: not only the question, but also Aristotle’s answer is, in a relevant sense, close to Socrates’. Socrates upheld that it is not possible that knowledge be defeated by pleasure. When one does what is evil, one acts by ignorance, pursuing what one wrongly takes as good, so that what was supposedly considered as *akrasia* might be avoided by the knowledge of the right measurement between present and future pleasures. In this perspective, therefore, we must inquire about the sort of ignorance involved in it (*ho tropos tês agnoias*, 1145b29), which fully explains what other people would consider as a case of conflict in which we are defeated by pleasure. Aristotle cannot sustain, as Socrates did, that the agent acts by ignorance, *di’ agnoian*, for that would render the incontinent act involuntary, something that Aristotle neatly refuses. Despite that, Aristotle himself claims a certain *state of ignorance* in which the agent is when he acts by *akrasia*. Whatever

this state may be, the act is not involuntary, for acting in a state of ignorance does not imply the involuntary character of the act, as it was shown in *NE* III. This state is compared to sleep, madness and drunkenness in *NE* VII 3, 1147a13–14; it is produced by affections or emotions (1147a14) and it is a task for the man who study nature to explain how such an ignorance (1147b6: *agnoia*) is dissolved, for it is not only a characteristic of the acratic man, but it also happens with men asleep or drunk. As he refers to ignorance in a relevant way and shows that such ignorance refers to the particular knowledge or the ‘last term’,<sup>12</sup> Aristotle may vindicate the Socratic perspective. In fact, he does so explicitly:

Because the last term is not universal nor equally an object of scientific knowledge with the universal term, the position that Socrates sought to establish actually seems to result; for it is not in the presence of what is thought to be knowledge proper that the passion overcomes (nor is it this that is dragged about as a result of the passion), but perceptual knowledge. (1147b13–17)<sup>13</sup>

Such a vindication is surprising, for it implies a way of understanding *akrasia* for which an explanation would be fundamentally an inquiry about the nature of the ignorance that affects knowledge. Now, in other passages from *NE*, Aristotle had presented the phenomenon of *akrasia*, as we saw, in a perspective that made us think that the conflict between appetite and reason was the central point, and this conflict was conceived of in such a manner that it presupposed both sides, reason and appetite, in their fully-fledged expression. Focusing now on ignorance risks of losing sight of that central feature of *akrasia*, namely the fact that, during our action, we know that we ought not to do what we are doing. Why then does Aristotle adopt such a cognitivist stand and seeks to get closer to Socrates’ perspective?

A reason for such a stand could be a safeguard that Aristotle would like to preserve recurring to Socrates. In fact, even if Aristotle generally admits the phenomenon of *akrasia*, he refuses it for the practically wise

<sup>12</sup> The expression is τὸν ἔσχατον ὅρον, that, as I shall later argue for, stands for the conclusion of the practical syllogism.

<sup>13</sup> Καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ καθόλου μηδ’ ἐπιστημονικὸν ὁμοίως εἶναι δοκεῖν τῷ καθόλου τὸν ἔσχατον ὅρον καὶ εἰκεν ὃ ἐζήτει Σωκράτης συμβαίνειν· οὐ γὰρ τῆς κυρίως ἐπιστήμης εἶναι δοκούσης περιγίνεται τὸ πάθος, οὐδ’ αὕτη περιέλεται διὰ τὸ πάθος, ἀλλὰ τῆς αἰσθητικῆς. This is (as throughout this paper) Rowe’s translation, reading with Stewart δοκούσης περιγίνεται at 1147b16.



man, the *phronimos*, the central character of his moral universe. The practically wise cannot be akratic, something that Aristotle twice claims in *NE* VII: the first in 2, 1146a7–9, the second in 10, 1152a6–8. Now, the practically wise or prudent, the *phronimos*, is the one that *knows* from the moral point of view, and, in this sense, he corresponds to the Socratic *epistamēnos*, the man who has the knowledge of good and evil. Despite the differences between the knowledge of the Aristotelian *phronimos* and that of the Socratic *epistamēnos*, neither of them are susceptible of *akrasia*. Perhaps it could be possible to explain the Aristotelian vindication of the Socratic perspective by his wish of getting rid of the possibility of *akrasia* for the practically wise man, as it happens with the Socratic man who has moral knowledge. This explanation, however, is far-fetched. In both passages where he claims that the practically wise man cannot be akratic, Aristotle justifies such impossibility not on the ground that the practically wise man *knows*, but rather on the ground that he *has the other virtues*, that is to say, the moral virtues—including noteworthy temperance or *sôphrosunê*, which allows no place for *akrasia*. It is not due to knowledge that *akrasia* is refused, but due to the presence of the moral virtues, which are acquired by habit and which are the necessary condition to prudence. In 1146a9, it is said that the practically wise cannot be incontinent because, further to the intellectual virtue that is prudence, he *has the other virtues*, and these virtues are the moral virtues; in 1152a8, it is said that *it has been shown that a practically wise is good in respect of character*, and based on that it is impossible that he acts incontinently. Thus, if Aristotle's concern were the elimination of the possibility that the practically wise man acts incontinently, then the recourse to the Socratic cognitivism would be worthless. For the elimination of that possibility is based on the presence of the moral virtues and not on the intellectual virtues (among which is prudence).

The problem of knowing why Aristotle seeks to adopt the Socratic perspective becomes even more complex when the strategy by which he claims his adoption is examined. Aristotle examines the question from the perspective of the practical syllogism. And this clearly entails new difficulties. The practical syllogism is not systematically treated by Aristotle, but it comes up three times in a relevant manner. In two of them, Aristotle wants to show that thought is sometimes followed by action and sometimes it is not. In *De Motu* 7 and in *De Anima* III 11, the answer provided is that thought does not move if it is contemplative, but it surely does if it is practical. In order to show that, Aristotle claims that action follows immediately the practical syllogism, or, more

conspicuously, the action is its conclusion, whether there is a statement or not, whilst in theoretical matters the conclusion is not itself an action. It is comprehensible that Aristotle, in such a context, talks about the doctrine of the practical syllogism, for syllogisms are inferences and reason is the faculty of inferences. Showing that action is the conclusion of the practical syllogism, Aristotle is showing at the same time that the practical reason moves the agent. Moreover, the immediacy of the action is enhanced in the *De Motu*, for Aristotle says that reason sometimes does not bother itself about the minor premise, which is the most obvious, but it goes straightway to action, which is the conclusion of the syllogism.<sup>14</sup>

The third passage where Aristotle deals with practical syllogisms is found in our treatise on *akrasia*. The situation, however, is very different. In the *De Motu* and in *De Anima*, the purpose was to show that reason can move, and that was done by showing that action is the conclusion of the practical syllogism. In *NE*, when it comes to *akrasia*, the point is not the same. The akratic man knows what he ought to do, but he does not do it. In terms of syllogism, it means that he knows the premises, both the major and the minor, he can even state the conclusion, but the action in which the syllogism should result does not follow; on the contrary, due to a present appetite, he acts differently. Thus, whilst in *De Motu* and in *De Anima* the syllogism was the proof of the practical character of reason, for action was its immediate conclusion, here in the *NE* the syllogism may be integral in the form of a statement, although it is not followed by any action in accordance with it. The contexts are very different and perhaps we should exercise some caution in applying automatically their rather distinct lessons to each other.

This difference can be highlighted by two elements. First, in *De Motu*, in order to enhance the immediacy of the action, it is emphasized that reason does not even consider the minor premise, which is taken as

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<sup>14</sup> *De Motu* 701a25–26: ‘and as sometimes happens in questioning, so here the intellect does not stop and consider at all the other premise, the obvious one’ (ὥσπερ δὲ τῶν ἐρωτῶντων ἔνιοι, οὕτω τὴν ἐτέραν πρότασιν τὴν δῆλην οὐδ’ ἡ διάνοια ἐπιστᾶσα σκοπεῖ οὐδέν). The other premise is the minor premise. In fact, the syllogisms presented are remarkable because of the obviousness of the minor premise. Aristotle presents two groups. In the first, there are syllogisms like ‘every man ought to walk; one is a man oneself: straightway one walks; or that, in this case, no man should walk, one is a man: straightway one remains at rest’ (701a13–15), ‘if walking is good for man, one does not dwell upon the premise ‘I am a man’’ (701a26–27, which illustrates the obviousness of the minor premise).

evident, and goes straightway to action, which is its conclusion. In *NE*, on the contrary, both premises are expressed, specially the minor, which is formally declared to be active (VII 3, 1147a33: *hautê de energei*). The problem is that here the action does not follow, yet *both* premises are present, the major and the minor ones. The second element refers to the enunciation of the conclusion. Notably in the *De Motu*, the action is the whole of the conclusion, with no hint at the conclusion being stated. This is understandable, for the immediacy of action has to be valid as well for other animals, which, differently from man, do not have reason, so they cannot state sentences. As it is pointed to in the *De Motu*, animals act in the same way of the mechanical toys, that is, automatically, i.e. immediately, and that is similar to man: man also acts *immediately*, as well as animals *automatically* act, though animals cannot express themselves through statements. But there is here an important disanalogy: even if men do not *formally state* the conclusion, they *necessarily must recognize* the last proposition as deriving from the other two premises as its conclusion, otherwise the action that stands for its practical content would be only *incidentally* its conclusion. This recognition is of course a rational, mental recognition, which is never the case in animals.

In the case of *akrasia*, the first two premises are present, but the action, which is the conclusion of the syllogism, fails to occur. Aristotle says:

The one opinion is universal, the other is concerned with the particular facts, and here we come to something within the sphere of perception; when a single opinion results from them,<sup>15</sup> the soul must in one type of case affirm the conclusion, while in the case of opinions concerned with production it must immediately act (1147a25–28).<sup>16</sup>

The passage tells us that, in theoretical syllogism, it is necessary that the soul *asserts* the conclusion (to itself or to others, affirming it), whereas,

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<sup>15</sup> Rowe's translation slightly modified. The phrase ὅταν δὲ μία γένηται ἐξ αὐτῶν, 'when a single opinion results from them', must be understood as saying that both kinds of proposition are taken as making up one single argument (and not as if there were two premises, and from them results the conclusion, a new proposition). For, as I try to show in the next paragraph, the opinion that is concerned with the particular is itself the conclusion and not a premise (the minor) which, linked to the major one, would result in a new proposition (the conclusion). Resulting in a single opinion means that all these elements, the universal opinion (which includes both the major and the minor premises) and the particular one (the conclusion) are taken to be *pieces* of a single syllogism.

<sup>16</sup> Ἡ μὲν γὰρ καθόλου δόξα, ἡ δ' ἑτέρα περὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστά ἐστιν, ὧν αἰσθησις ἡδὴ κυρία: ὅταν δὲ μία γένηται ἐξ αὐτῶν, ἀνάγκη τὸ συμπερανθὲν ἔνθα μὲν φάναι τὴν ψυχὴν, ἐν δὲ ταῖς ποιητικαῖς πράττειν εὐθύς.

in the practical syllogism, it is necessary to immediately *act*. For, if no action follows the practical syllogism, the agent finds himself in a (practical) contradiction. Nevertheless, nothing hinders the agent from also asserting the conclusion in practical matters: this is a possibility that always remains open for him. In the preceding lines, it is mentioned the cases of saying demonstrations and verses of Empedocles while being drunk (1147a20), of stringing together the phrases of a science one has just begun to learn (1147a21–22), or the utterance of a text as the actors do it (1147a22–23). ‘It is in this way that’, Aristotle writes, ‘we must suppose that also the incontinent men speak’<sup>17</sup> (1147a23–24). All this seems to show that, even if it is not necessary, in the case of *akrasia* one might enunciate the conclusion. It is what seems to happen when a drunkard utters Empedocles’ demonstrations; the conclusion is surely mentioned, although he does not know what he is saying in a strict sense. So do similarly the apprentice and the actors: they utter the conclusions, yet, in a strict sense, these are not *their* conclusions. In the *phusikôs* explanation of *akrasia*, similarly, one has the major premise that forbids the eating of what is sweet, the minor according to which this is sweet, however, due to the fact that there is a contrary appetite that is present, even if the syllogism *declares* the avoidance of this (1147a34), the appetite makes one act differently. Again, in opposition to the absence of action, the utterance of the conclusion is expressed, or at least suggested. And it is not surprising that, in the case of *akrasia*, the conclusion of the practical syllogism might be enunciated. For the agent must necessarily *recognize* the sentence as the conclusion of the syllogism, so that the act that immediately follows achieve not incidentally what is the propositional content of the conclusion. And if the agent necessarily recognizes it as the conclusion, nothing hinders that he *also* asserts it, even if it is not necessary that he says it aloud. The problem of *akrasia* consists in the fact that the action described in the conclusion, and recognized as such, fails to occur; so that one is in a *practical* contradiction, for it is *necessary* that the action occurs, be the conclusion stated or not. Saying the conclusion is a useless attempt to fill the emptiness caused by the absence of action. It does not add any logical element to the problem; it is just a mere possibility, something that puts more light, nevertheless, on the exclusively human dimension of the phenomenon of *akrasia*.

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<sup>17</sup> Οὕτως ὑποληπτέον λέγειν καὶ τοὺς ἀκρατευομένους.

There is also a significant difference regarding the expression ‘the other premise’ in the *De Motu* and in the *NE*, a difference that, according to my opinion, reinforces the splitting of the use of the practical syllogism in the set *De Motu*—*De Anima* and in *NE*. In the *De Motu*, ‘the other premise’ (701a25: *tên heteran protasin*) is the minor premise, described as evident (*tên délên*, 701a26) and exemplified by *one is a man* (701a13, a15, a27), *the house is a good* (701a17) and *the coat is a clothe* (a18). In *De Anima*, it is explained that, of the two premises, one, the universal, enunciates that *one ought to do this*, and the other, the particular, enunciates either that *this is of a certain sort* or that *I am of a certain sort* (434a16–19). Both of the texts give the same lesson: *this is of a certain sort* is the general expression of which *the house is a good* and *the coat is a clothe* are particular cases; *I am of a certain sort* equally is the generalised expression of *one is a man*. In *De Motu*, it is added that the major premise is the one of the good and the minor is the one of the possible (701a24–25), what is again in accordance with the scheme of the *De Anima*. It is tempting to interpret *hê d’hetera* in *NE* VII 3, 1147a25 as the designation of the minor premise, but I think we ought to resist this temptation (literally, in *NE*, it is the other opinion, *doxa*, but this is not relevant, for in the passages from *De Motu* and from *De Anima* there is also a terminological oscillation between *doxa* and *protasis*). In *NE*, the minor premise is included in the *universal* ones and it might be of two sorts: either it is applied to the person that says the syllogism, as *he himself is a man*, or it is applied to a thing, as *such a thing is dry* (1147a4–6). What is opposed to the universal premise (or opinion) as a particular is not, in *NE*, the minor premise (as it is in *De Motu* and in *De Anima*), but the *conclusion*, called the last proposition (*hê teleutaia protasis*) in 1147b9, and the last term (*ton eschaton horon*) in b14, conclusion that either the person does not have or it is not in actuality (*ê ouk echei ê ouk energei*, 1147a7; the minor premise, on the contrary, is definitely in act: see 1147a33). In the same direction, in 1147a31, Aristotle mentions, on one hand, the universal one that forbids the eating of sweets and the (universal) that declares that every sweet is pleasant; to both is added, in 1147a33, the minor premise *this is sweet*, and this minor premise is equally taken as universal. Therefore, the vocabulary in *NE* VII and in *De Anima*—*De Motu* is not the same; moreover, as I want to show, neither is the doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The situation seems to become even more complex when we look at *NE* VI 11, 1143b4 τῆς ἐτέρας προτάσεως, which can be taken to designate the other *premise*, that

I am insisting on the differences between one and another use of the practical syllogism because I think that the role it plays in the inquiry of *akrasia* in *NE* VII is distinct from the one in *De Motu* and *De Anima*. In the sequence of the *NE* text cited above, which, I want to remind, is found within a *phusikós* investigation, Aristotle supposes a major premise A, the one that forbids the eating of what is sweet, and a minor premise B, ‘this is sweet’, which is expressly said to be in act (1147a33). However, even if the conclusion says that one ought to avoid this (1147a34), due to a contrary appetite the agent does the opposite thing. There is something like a divorce between what he declares and what he does, and this divorce is produced by the effect of an appetite, *epithumia*, the desire of the pleasant (1147a33, b2), or, more generally, under the effect of an affection (*dia to pathos*, 1147b17; 1150b20), which, as it defeats reason, moves the agent towards another direction. Thus, what is the use of the recourse to the practical syllogism in this context, if, as we saw, this doctrine was introduced to emphasise the immediacy of the action, and this is in the case of *akrasia*, simply fails to occur because something other is present, i.e. an affection, which takes the place of the rational desire?

If *akrasia* is explained in terms of a conflict between reason and emotion, practical syllogism is useless, or at most of very little use; however, perhaps it is useful to present something other. In fact, in the Socratic intellectualism, one who knows acts well and cannot help acting well, for knowledge does not have a nature such that it can be changed or dragged about by other thing, but it conducts the action, whatever affects the agent. The referred knowledge is the moral knowledge, but, as we can see, there is no relevant difference regarding to the inferential processes between the practical and the theoretical knowledge. Hence, in this doctrine, if there is no relevant difference, the practical syllogism might be able to describe the rational procedure of choice in so a satisfactory way as it does in theoretical matters. Thus, if the agent has the major premise A and the minor premise B, he infers C and acts in accordance with its prescription, and this is a

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is, the minor one. Nonetheless not only is this passage concerning the practical intellect found in book VI, not in VII—and maybe due to that it would highlighten the peculiarity of the use of the practical syllogism in the treatise on *akrasia*—, but also it is not so certain that it does there refer to the minor premise, for that to which it there refers is said to be the ἐσχατος ὅρος, that which begins the action—and this latter is the *conclusion* of a practical syllogism, not the minor premise.

rigorous presentation of the rational choice according to the Socratic intellectualism. When Aristotle presents the case he wants to analyse in terms of a practical syllogism, he presents the Socratic thesis of action in an irreproachable manner, for, in this perspective, the syllogism perfectly describes the action. At the same time, he preserves Socrates' position (which consists of in the denial that knowledge can be dragged about by other things, whatever they are) by placing the epistemic failure in the particular premise, that is, in the conclusion, not in the universal ones (the major or the minor premises). Otherwise stated, the epistemic failure concerns that part which is not properly knowledge (for it is not properly a universal proposition), but is, as it is expressly noted, 'an opinion about a perceptible object which determines our actions' (1147b9–10).<sup>19</sup> Aristotle's strategy when he refers to the practical syllogism does not aim at the presentation of his own solution (which, indeed, works with the strength of an appetite that defeats what the agent thinks); on the contrary, it aims at the preservation of the Socratic position, presenting it correctly and defending it, as the epistemic fault (that manner of ignorance: *ho tropos tēs agnoias*, 1145b29) does not occur in what is properly knowledge. In a Aristotelian proper use, the doctrine of the practical syllogism illustrates the promptness of the action in practical matters; in the context of the examination of *akrasia*, however, Aristotle refers to the practical syllogism in order to inquiry, in the Socratic perspective, whether the ignorance involved affects knowledge (and, consequently, impairs the Socratic thesis) or it affects other element (and, therefore, the Socratic thesis may be preserved). At the end of the inquiry, Socrates may be vindicated, what is not a insignificant result, for, as Aristotle himself acknowledges, the Socratic thesis contradicts the plain phenomena (1145b28). The analyses by means of the practical syllogism, however, allowed him to render it acceptable, at least in the sense that knowledge or what is properly knowledge is not dragged about by the affections.

### 3. Aristotle's use of dialectics in EN VII

I may now return to my first question: why, then, Aristotle so insistently seeks to preserve the Socratic position? I think that Aristotle supplied the

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<sup>19</sup> Δόξα τε αἰσθητοῦ καὶ κυρία τῶν πράξεων.

answer to this question in an exemplary honest manner. In the famous passage concerning the method, which is found in the beginning of the treatise on *akrasia*, Aristotle writes the following:

We must, as in all other cases, set the manifestations (*phainomena*) before us and, after first discussing the difficulties, go on to prove, above all, the truth of all the common opinions (*ta endoxa*) about these affections, or, failing this, of the greater number and the most authoritative; for if we both resolve the difficulties and leave the reputable opinions (*ta endoxa*) undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently (1145b2–7).<sup>20</sup>

The passage has several well-known difficulties, which I shall just mention here. It is a general presentation of the dialectical method, but some doubts are persistent. Firstly, we have to decide what *ta phainomena* stands for: are they *manifestations* in the sense of (empirical) evidences, or are they *manifestations* the sense of the accepted opinions, *ta endoxa*, the ones that provide the premises for the dialectical syllogisms?<sup>21</sup> Secondly, the context does not clearly say what is meant by *as in all other cases*. It might be a restrict application to the ethical problems, which would be, therefore, distinct from other disciplines. Or it can apply only to some ethical problems, distinct from others inside the ethical discipline. Or, still, it can be suggested that Aristotle would be claiming an expansion of the dialectical method to other disciplines, which could also include the theoretical sciences.<sup>22</sup> I cannot discuss this issue here; fortunately, the problem I want to examine does not depend on its solution. For, whatever are the limits (or absence of limits) of this dialectical method, it does include the examination of *akrasia* (as well as similar ones, whatever they are), and what is fundamental for the argument I want to offer is the *way* the dialectical method is applied precisely to the case of *akrasia*. Dialectical proofs are not rare in the ethical treatises, notably in the *EE*. In *EE* I 3, 1214b28–15a7, for instance, we have a favourable appraisal of the dialectical method which ends with the recalling of the ambition of *putting* the opinions *to the test* (*exetazein*), since the

<sup>20</sup> Δεῖ δ', ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, τιθέντας τὰ φαινόμενα καὶ πρῶτον διαπορήσαντας οὕτω δεικνύναι μάλιστα μὲν πάντα τὰ ἐνδοξα περὶ ταῦτα τὰ πάθη, εἰ δὲ μή, τὰ πλείστα καὶ κυριώτατα· ἐὰν γὰρ λύηται τε τὰ δυσχερῆ καὶ καταλείπηται τὰ ἐνδοξα, δεδειγμένον ἂν εἶη ἱκανῶς.

<sup>21</sup> On this point, see specially Owen (1961).

<sup>22</sup> Berti (1989) upheld a generalised expansion: Aristotle would have proposed the dialectics as a method for physics and metaphysics, and ethics; Barnes (1980) is more careful, as he points to the inevitable cleavage that separates the search for truth from the coherence of the accepted opinions.



*refutations* (*elenchoi*) of what is opposed to the argument are equivalent to the *demonstrations* (*apodeixeis*) of the arguments themselves. This is a canonical dialectical attitude, centred on the practice of examination by way of refutation of the theses proposed, which cannot but be a combative method. In a passage on method in the beginning of the Eudemian analysis of friendship, we find again a favourable appraisal of the dialectical method; however, it is not so combative, but presents a milder way of arguing:

We must, then, find a method that will best explain the views held on these topics, and also put an end to difficulties and contradictions. And this will happen if the contrary views are seen to be held with some show of reason; such a view will be most in harmony with the *phainomena*; and both the contradictory statements will in the end stand, if what is said is true in one sense but untrue in another<sup>23</sup> (*EE* VII 2, 1235b13–18).

This is what we actually find at the end of *NE* VI (*EE* V) about the unity of virtues. Aristotle shows in *NE* VI 13 1144b30–45a2 that Gorgias and Socrates are both right, and both wrong: Gorgias is right in sustaining that the virtues exist in separation from each other, as long as we think of the natural virtues, but wrong in what regards the virtues in the strict sense, those that involve practical reason; Socrates is right in sustaining the connection of all the virtues in the strict sense, but wrong in denying that the natural virtues can exist apart from each other. By recognising what is right and what is wrong in both thinkers, the dialectical dispute comes to an end. In the dialectical treatment of *akrasia*, what is remarkable is that it is still milder than this already friendly dialectic examination. The dialectical method proposed for *akrasia* works with the inquiry of difficulties and aporias, but not only it does not aim at the refutation of the contrary opinions, but also it aims to *preserve* the reputable theses, leaving them untouched. On the one hand, it does not have the refuting dimension that the canonical dialectical argument has as its outstanding feature (the one we can find prominently, for instance, in book IV of the *Metaphysics* regarding the principle of non-contradiction). On the other hand, here the demonstration is considered satisfactory when the opinions remain *untouched*, when

<sup>23</sup> Ληπτέος δὴ τρόπος ὅστις ἡμῖν ἅμα τὰ τε δοκοῦντα περὶ τούτων μάλιστα ἀποδώσει, καὶ τὰς ἀπορίας λύσει καὶ τὰς ἐναντιώσεις. τοῦτο δ' ἔσται, ἐὰν εὐλόγως φαίνηται τὰ ἐναντία δοκοῦντα· μάλιστα γὰρ ὁμολογούμενος ὁ τοιοῦτος ἔσται λόγος τοῖς φαινομένοις, συμβαίνει δὲ μένειν τὰς ἐναντιώσεις, ἐὰν ἔσται μὲν ὡς ἀληθὲς ἢ τὸ λεγόμενον, ἔστι δ' ὡς οὐ.

the truth of each opinion is *acknowledged*. So, this friendly dialectics is particularly *generous*, for it intends above all to save *all* the opinions; if it is not possible, at least the majority of them and the most authoritative ones. Its generosity reappears outstandingly in *EE* I 6, 1216b26–35, when it is said that the best consists in the agreement of *all* in relation to the theses that are upheld. However, two pages before, in I 3, 1214b28–15a15a7, some restriction is made, for it is not worthy to examine the opinions of every man, neither the majority's; anyhow, this passage too wants to preserve if not all, at least most of the opinions of the philosophers, namely the authoritative ones. This is again in harmony with the passage on method about *akrasia*. This generosity is its prominent feature; it goes in the line of the friendly treatment of the opposed views as it is exposed in the treatise of friendship, but it goes further as it treats the opposed views in a very generous way, as it tries to preserve all of them, leaving all them untouched, or at least the most authoritative ones.

Book VII on *akrasia* is a common book (= *EE* VI), and even if it does not belong originally to the *Eudemian Ethics*, it does anyway partake of the dialectical ambiance that is pervasive to *EE*, and it proposes a particularly generous dialectics. It is then not surprising that Aristotle wants to save the Socratic perspective: the strength of the proposed method consists in the preservation of all the opinions; if it is not possible, at least the preservation of the majority and of the most authoritative. Although it contradicts the accepted opinions, the preservation of the Socratic thesis is emblematic in such a method; if it is preserved (at least in part, as *EE* VII 2, 1235b13–18 suggests), *we shall have proved the case sufficiently* (*NE* VII 1, 1145b7). Aristotle's efforts are so devoted to the preservation of the Socratic thesis, despite its evident difficulties; in order to do that, one of the strategies is the recourse to the practical syllogism, which is perfectly fit to the Socratic intellectualism, so that it shows that the ignorance affects the conclusion, not the premises, something that saves Socrates' assertion, for only the latter have universal nature, the property of all knowledge strictly speaking, while the former is particular, which is typical of sensation.

Neither is it surprising that there is so much discussion to know what is Aristotle's position: in favour of or against Socrates? In fact, the method used puts Aristotle in a *neutral* position: the demonstration will be made through the preservation of all opinions or, at least, of the majority and most authoritative of them. Aristotle uses a rather *non-committal language*: he defends the Socratic perspective without adopting

it, for demonstrating is, in this case, to preserve the larger number of the authorised opinions. In order to do that, Aristotle has to present a conciliatory version within which the Socratism can find its place. This is what he actually does. After rejecting an attempt to preserve the Socratic perspective, which consisted in the claiming that, although science is not dragged about, opinions could be defeated by pleasure,<sup>24</sup> Aristotle presents four steps in what seems to be the solution of the problem of *akrasia*. The first step is presented in *NE* VII 3, 1146b31–35 and it consists in the distinction between knowledge (in potentiality) and knowledge in actuality. If knowledge is in actuality, it would be strange that something else could drag it about, but not if it is not in actuality in some sense. The distinction between potentiality and actuality is canonical within Aristotelianism. In the second step (1146b35–47a10), Aristotle presents another distinction in order to pinpoint that which ignorance affects (that is, that something whose knowledge will be only in potency). This distinction, however, does not follow the strict line of Aristotelianism. It is the distinction between the universal and the particular; but, as we saw, the universal comprises both premises, the major and the minor, which does not corresponds to what Aristotle presents in *De Motu* and in *De Anima*, but such a distinction is decisive here to save the Socratic thesis.<sup>25</sup>

In the third step (1147a10–24), it is presented what looks like a solution: the incontinent has the premises, but he either does not have or does not use the conclusion, as it happens with someone who is asleep,

<sup>24</sup> This position is reported in *NE* VII 2, 1145b31–35; Aristotle presents his answer in 3, 1146b24–31, arguing that the conviction in the action is the same whether it is grounded on an opinion or on a knowledge; in fact, some people that have only an opinion sometimes act more convincingly than the ones who have knowledge. The same point is made by Plato in the *Protagoras*. In 352b5–c1 it is said that the majority takes for granted, falsely, that *science* can be dragged about by passion; six pages later, however, Plato writes that nobody who *knows* or *believes* that something is better than what he is doing, and he can do it, does other things instead of it (358b7–c1: οὐδείς οὔτε εἰδὼς οὔτε οἰόμενος ἄλλα βελτίω εἶναι ἢ ἃ ποιεῖ, καὶ δυνατά, ἔπειτα ποιεῖ ταῦτα, ἐξὸν τὰ βελτίω).

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle introduces it by mentioning two sorts of premises, δύο τρόποι τῶν προτάσεων (1146b35–47a1), probably taking the term in its general meaning, as *pieces* of a syllogism (which includes the conclusion; cf. the definition of πρότασις in *Prior. An.* 24a16–17 as a statement that asserts or denies something of something), for the first sort, described as universal, comprises both the major and the minor premise, whilst the second, described as particular, can only be referred to the conclusion, since it is said that the agent either fails to have it or it is not in act; now, in 1147a33 Aristotle says that the minor premise is in act, which would be in a clear contradiction with this passage if we take what he calls particular as related to the minor premise.

mad or drunk. The point clearly is that he has it, but does not make use of it. One who is commanded by passion acts similarly, and this is *akrasia*: the sexual appetites, for instance, clearly provoke alterations in the body and lead some people to madness. This third step, however, is presented as *another sense <of possession of knowledge> than those just named* (1147a10–11). This is strange, for the senses *just named* are those described in the two previous steps, in relation to which the third step is supposed to be in continuity, giving them a more accurate interpretation. If, however, this third step is different from the others, it somehow presents a rupture: nevertheless, it is not clear what this rupture is, if the third step also uses the general scheme of distinguishing between knowledge in act and knowledge in potency, something that was also in the two previous steps. Yet, we can see something new in the third step, something that can operate as an element of rupture compared to the previous steps. In step one and two, there is the distinction between the knowledge in act and knowledge in potency *which the agent may use at any time, although he does not use it*. This distinction is typically Aristotelian: Aristotle distinguishes between having the knowledge in potency as the child that can be taught and having it in potency as someone who was already taught, but that is not using it now; whereas the latter can recall his knowledge at any time, the former cannot do it. Regarding the child, it is potency<sub>1</sub>; regarding the one that has it but does not use it, it is potency<sub>2</sub>. In step one and two, the knowledge in potency is clearly the potency<sub>2</sub>. However, the third step shows that, in the case of *akrasia*, the situation is different, for the akratic man is not able to recall his knowledge, at least no more than the mad, the drunkard and the asleep can do it. The *akrates* has the knowledge, but cannot resort to it, that is, his knowledge in potency is neither potency<sub>1</sub> nor, strictly speaking, the one of potency<sub>2</sub>, for, in a relevant sense, he is unable to recall it. This constitutes such an important difference that the third step presents *another sense <of possession of knowledge> than those just named*.<sup>26</sup> In fact, if one has the knowledge, which one may resort to, but does not do it, the moral evaluation would surely be more severe regarding

<sup>26</sup> Although it can be treated not as a difference or rupture but as continuous to potency<sub>2</sub>, as one sees in *De Gen. Animalium* II 1, 735a9–11 ('but a thing existing potentially may be nearer or further from its realization in actuality, just as a sleeping geometer is further away than one awake and the latter than one actually studying'), here it is treated as something new, added to that distinction, thus as not being presupposed by it.

oneself than it would be regarding the one that has the knowledge, but is in some sense unable to resort to it (*cf.* 1147a11–15).

A fourth step is then added (1147a24–b9), this time from the perspective of a *phusikôs* explanation. Such a kind of explanation predisposes the reader to consider this fourth step as the final Aristotelian solution. In Aristotle's work, the explanation of *natural* or *scientific character* often completes and supersedes the *logikôs* explanation, which, proceeding only through logical-linguistic traces, can provide a useful outline of the solution, but cannot properly be the solution itself. Nevertheless, the fourth step remains closely connected to the project of preservation of the Socratism, for it works by assemblage of elements from the previous steps. It reiterates, indeed, the analysis of the syllogism that can be found in the second step, according to which the particular is the conclusion, and assimilates the referred ignorance to the one of the drunkard and the asleep, highlighting once more the peculiarity of the knowledge in potency. This fourth step rightly emphasises the role of appetite, for it is the one that, being present, takes the place of the absent conclusion and, furnishing itself with the adequate premises, leads the agent to act contrarily to that he ought to do. This—the grip of passion on the agent—is surely proper to the Aristotelianism. However, the appetite and the notion of conflict had already arisen in the third step, and so they are not novelties; more important, as the others, the fourth step is a compromise, within which Socratic elements are preserved and, at the same time, are adapted to the perspective according to which the action ought to be analysed in the light of the possibility of a conflict between reason and appetite, a perspective that the Socratism intended to eliminate.

The fourth and final step is not, thus, *the* Aristotle's solution, but it is imbedded, as the others, in a project of a possible conciliation between two very different perspectives, the Socratic one and the perspective of a conflict, a conciliation that has to be pursued if the method of proof consists in the more you save the opinions the more you prove. This is, indeed, the method that guides Aristotle's inquiry on *akrasia* and that he thought that it could be applied to similar cases. It is at least what he did in book VII. It is difficult to determine how long Aristotle adhered to this method and what are the boundaries of it. There are other traces of this attitude in the *Eudemian Ethics*, and maybe it is significant that the inquiry on *akrasia* is found in a common book; this could lead us to theses of chronological nature, whose outcomes, unfortunately, in what regards to Aristotle's work, are unreliable. There are, however, internal

cues that shows that such a method might have faded away very quickly. In some passages of book VII, after 3 1147b19, where it is declared that the analyses of the sort of knowledge that has the incontinent is concluded, and outside book VII, but still in *NE*, as well as in other works, the perspective is not any longer that one of reconciliation and preservation of the Socratic perspective, but Aristotle only puts forward, as we saw, the conflict between a rational desire and an appetite, and the winner is the latter. In all these passages, there is no hint any longer to an epistemic inquiry about the sort of ignorance that affects the incontinent which could remind us of the Socrates' thesis.<sup>27</sup>

A reason for this fading away might be an incongruity the preserved Socratic perspective cannot get rid of. In the Socratic perspective, the agent knows in a relevant sense the premises, but he cannot acknowledge the conclusion *as resulting from* the premises—otherwise, either his knowledge is defeated by passion or there is no *akrasia* at all. Now, if the acratie man does not recognise the conclusion as a piece of reasoning deriving from the premises, he can be assimilated to a mad man, that is to the one who is purely irrational. This is however surely too excessive; not only is missing that central feature of *akrasia* (the consciousness that he ought not to do what he is doing when he is doing it), but also any trait of rationality disappears—and probably with it *akrasia* itself. Notwithstanding, Aristotle somehow accepted this assimilation, for he himself compared the ignorance that affects the incontinent to the one that affects the mad man (1147a13). Nevertheless, he soon realised that such a comparison is incorrect, for later on mad men (6, 1150a1) are placed together with animals, for they are incapable of virtue or vice on account of their lack of reason and deliberate choice (1149b34–36), and there are no acratie animals. For in *akrasia* it is *necessary* that one acknowledges the conclusion as the result of the premises he accepts; if he fails to acknowledge this, there is no relevant (practical) knowledge; without this knowledge, not only he is not in a practical contradiction, in which *akrasia* consists, but also

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<sup>27</sup> In the *Magna Moralia*, we also have a kind of farewell to Socrates' thesis (1200b30: 'but surely he <Socrates> was mistaken'), but all along *MM* II 6 *akrasia* is still explained as a kind of ignorance, this time clearly related to the minor premise. Strangely enough, although, no major difference is here stressed between a theoretical and a practical syllogism, so that it does not appear that failure of action should refer rather to an ignorance of the conclusion (which is the action to be made). This point should count as one more difficulty to treat the *MM* as a typically Aristotelian treatise or as giving normally Aristotelian answers.

he departs from the domain of rationality, which however has to be presupposed in every case of *akrasia*.

When Aristotle analyses the practical syllogism in *NE VII*, he notices that one who syllogises using a practical syllogism, if he is not prevented, *at the same time also does it* (3, 1147a31), namely he does what the conclusion commands. But if he *also* does it, there is something else that he does at the same time. What is it? It cannot be the simple utterance of the conclusion, for that, as we saw, was only a possibility of the conflict in its human dimension. This other thing that is necessary in order to be in conflict, is the *acknowledgement* of the conclusion as the result of the premises. Interrupting or ignoring the conclusion after granting the premises has strong consequences: the pure and simple irrationality. If the akratic man fails to acknowledge the conclusion as a conclusion, he is not exactly in a practical contradiction: he is rather in a much more uncomfortable position, *i.e.* the one occupied by the irrational man. Now, Aristotle does relate the akratic man to the mad man. In order to get out of this assimilation, all that Aristotle can do with his dialectical method, and that he in fact does, is to favour the comparison between the incontinent and the drunkard or the asleep (1147b7) and give a short shrift to the mad man. He has a good reason to do that, for in the case of sleep and drunkenness, the absence of acknowledgement is *momentary*, while with madness it is persistent. This is more acceptable, for, as Aristotle says, *akrasia* is like epilepsy, for both are not continuous but momentary (8, 1150b34). The akratic man is in some state of insanity, fortunately a momentary one. This is not, however, entirely satisfactory. *At the moment that the action occurs*, the acknowledgement is absent; yet, the conflict occurs or fails to occur exactly at that moment, for action is always *at the moment* (II 2, 1104a8). Perhaps this internal cue might have been strong enough to lead Aristotle to no more try to rescue Socrates when his thesis clearly contradicts the plain phenomena, and eventually to disbelieve that an issue is the more proved the more opinions are saved.





ARISTOTLE'S WEAK *AKRATES*:  
WHAT DOES HER IGNORANCE CONSIST IN?\*

DAVID CHARLES

My starting point in this paper is a controversial set of assumptions about Aristotle's treatment of *akrasia*, which some will reject out of hand. More specifically, I shall take for granted the following claims.

[A] One of Aristotle's *akrates* gets to a good conclusion of the form 'I should not eat this,' knows the relevant major and minor premises, but fails to act accordingly. I shall label this *akrates* the weak *akrates*.

[B] Her state, according to Aristotle, when she acts can be characterised as follows: 'it is like that of a person who does not know but merely says the verses of Empedocles.'

I have argued elsewhere for both.<sup>1</sup> While some of my earlier arguments could profitably be refined, I shall not attempt that task here. My present focus is rather on the issue raised by [B]: in what way is the state of the weak *akrates* like that of one who says something but does not know it?<sup>2</sup>

In *NE/EE* VII 3 Aristotle does not devote much time or space to this issue. For while he refers to the knowledge failure of the weak *akrates* as being *like* that of failures in non-practical, theoretical, reasoning (1147b11–12, 1147a18–24, esp. 23 f.), he does not say what the relevant degree of likeness is. That is, he does not address the following question: does the weak *akrates* fail in intellectual knowledge or is her failure only like a failure of this type? This question can be made more precise: is the weak *akrates*'s failure of precisely the same type as that of the drunkard who repeats the verses of Empedocles, the young student who composes arguments without knowledge or the actors? Or is it rather (in some way) like these intellectual failures? *NE/EE* VII 3 does not contain an explicit answer to this important question.

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<sup>1</sup> In Charles (1984), 118–132, 137–143, 156–7.

<sup>2</sup> While I considered this issue in Charles (1984), 161–188, I am no longer satisfied with certain parts of that discussion.

Most interpreters have suggested that Aristotle did, in fact, answer these questions outside of *NE/EE* VII 3. Two main lines of interpretation, which correspond to the two philosophically dominant approaches to the topic of *akrasia* itself, have been proposed. They can be presented (somewhat schematically) as follows.

(1) *The cognitivist interpretation of the weak akrates*: on this view, the failure of the weak *akrates* is (according to Aristotle) of precisely the same type as is to be found in theroretical (or non-practical) reasoning. It is what I shall call a failure of cognition. So understood, the weak *akrates* fails to understand the conclusion, fails to attend to it, fails to see it clearly, or fails to believe it. The practically wise, by contrast, understands the good conclusion, attends to it or believes it and so acts accordingly. This interpretation attributes to Aristotle what might be called a Socratic view of practical knowledge and *akrasia*.<sup>3</sup>

(2) *The Humean interpretation of the weak akrates*: on this view, the failure of the weak *akrates* is (according to Aristotle) a failure in practical knowledge which is like a failure in theoretical reasoning but is not of precisely the same type. So understood, practical knowledge is taken to be made up of two independent, separable, components: good cognition and good desire. The weak *akrates* can fail to have practical knowledge by failing to have the appropriate desire.<sup>4</sup> This interpretation attributes to Aristotle what might be called a Humean view of practical knowledge and *akrasia*.

Both sets of interpreters look beyond *NE/EE* VII 3 to support their accounts. Some confine themselves to the *Nicomachean* or *Eudemian Ethics* (or even to the books they share) and aim to understand Aristotle's account of *akrasia* in the *Ethics* (or some part of it). Others introduce evidence from relevant texts in *De Anima* or *De Motu Animalium* and aim to understand Aristotle's remarks on *akrasia* in his scientific and ethical writings as a whole. While I shall follow the latter methodology, my conclusions are distinctive. For I shall argue that Aristotle accepted neither the Socratic nor the Humean view but developed his own strikingly original alternative.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For example, Robinson (1969), McDowell (1978), Bostock (2000), chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> See Dahl (1983). My talk of motivational and valuational states in Charles (1984), 167 ff. might suggest this style of Humean interpretation. (For non-Humean elements in my earlier discussion, see *Ibid.*, 88.)

<sup>5</sup> I return to this methodological issue at the end of the paper.

1. *The Knowledge Failure of the Weak Akrates (I):  
The Pure Cognitivist Interpretation*

Most cognitive interpreters represent Aristotle's *akrates* as failing to grasp or use the information embedded in the minor premises.<sup>6</sup> Nor is this surprising. There is a serious problem for any cognitivist interpretation of the weak *akrates* which allows that she puts together major and minor premises, reaches the conclusion but still fails to know it. The problem is this: surely, if someone knows (intellectually) the premises, and puts them together in the right way, they must know the conclusion? If so, how can the weak *akrates* fail to know the conclusion if she knows intellectually the premises and puts them together to draw the conclusion? Worse still, in *Prior Analytics* 67a33–b10 Aristotle himself seems to recognise that if one actively contemplates together premises such as 'All mules are sterile' and 'This is a mule' one will know that this mule is sterile. Indeed, there the only way in which one can fail to draw the relevant conclusion while having the premises is if one does not contemplate them together (67a35–37). In this case one may have both universal and particular premises but will not use them to draw the appropriate conclusion (67b2–3).<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, the examples which Aristotle offers of knowledge failure in *NE/EE* VII 3 (young students, drunkards, actors) do not pinpoint precisely the type of intellectual failure suffered by the weak *akrates* (on the cognitivist interpretation now under consideration). For none of them know P, know that  $[P \rightarrow Q]$ , put these premises together but still fail to know Q. The drunk reciter of Empedokles, who repeats the proofs, does not seem to know (at that time) any of P,  $[P \rightarrow Q]$  or Q. He is certainly not in the position (envisaged by the cognitivist interpreter) of one who knows the premises and puts them together but still fails to know the conclusion. Nor is the actor. Nor are the young students, who fail to grasp properly the starting points of the relevant proofs. For they fail to understand the relevant premises in the required way (See *NE/EE* VI 8, 1142a19–20). They are not in the situation of the weak *akrates*, who (on the cognitivist view), knows P, knows that

<sup>6</sup> Robinson (1969).

<sup>7</sup> This may occur when one knows both that all mules are sterile and that this is a mule but has not previously considered these two pieces of information together (67b7–8). On this passage, see Charles (1984), 126 f.

$[P \rightarrow Q]$ , combines these pieces of knowledge to reach the conclusion  $Q$ , but still fails to know  $Q$ .

In Aristotle's three examples something is said and not known *because* the premises from which it is drawn are not fully known. The words said may come from knowledge, but they are not derived from the knowledge of the same person who says the conclusion. But such cases are fundamentally unlike that of the weak *akrates*, who (on the cognitivist view) knows and uses the premises to arrive at the conclusion, which she still fails to know. If Aristotle is seeking to isolate the distinctive type of cognitive failure which affects the weak *akrates*, he has failed to do so. In his examples the relevant agent fails to know the premises as well as the conclusion of practical reasoning.

The difficulty is pressing for the cognitivist. It is not merely that Aristotle has failed to focus his remarks on the precise location at which (on the present cognitivist interpretation) the weak *akrates* fails. He has not even addressed the major problem for the cognitivist account. The difficulty can be stated more fully thus: if intellectual cognition focuses solely on to the truth of the claims considered and on their degree of evidential support, how can anyone know  $P$ , know that  $[P \rightarrow Q]$ , put these pieces of knowledge together and still fail to know  $Q$ ? For if cognition tracks truth from premises to conclusion, how can anything prevent someone from knowing  $Q$ , when he knows  $P$ , knows that  $[P \rightarrow Q]$  and puts these pieces of knowledge together to arrive at  $Q$  as the conclusion? It is often thought that this is impossible. Aristotle does not countenance such a possibility in his related discussion in *Prior Analytics* 67a33 ff. Given this, one would certainly have expected him now to have provided either a theory or a relevant example (involving perhaps self-deception or blindness about a theoretical conclusion induced by passion etc.) to show how, despite appearances, such a case is in fact possible.<sup>8</sup> He could not responsibly merely assert in his discussion of weak *akrasia* that this is the case. Isn't it more likely that he is not a cognitivist than that he fails to address the central difficulty in the cognitivist account, a difficulty of which he is fully aware?

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<sup>8</sup> If Aristotle had been following the cognitivist line, one would have expected him to have introduced an example (outside the case of the weak *akrates*) in which someone draws an entailed conclusion but is unwilling to believe it. ('I see that the argument, whose premisses I accept, leads to the conclusion that  $Q$ , but I cannot bring myself to believe  $Q$ .) But no such example is given.

A cognitivist interpreter might reply as follows. He will cede that Aristotle does not provide an example in 1147a10–24 of precisely the type of knowledge failure suffered by the weak *akrates*, but will suggest that his remarks do nonetheless point in the general direction of a cognitivist account. Thus, the desires of the weak *akrates* may warp his reasoning in just the way required to make possible his distinctive intellectual failure to grasp the conclusion. Perhaps, they subvert his reasoning to the extent that he does not fully understand or clearly focus on the conclusion he draws. If so, the weak *akrates*' concluding words will come from knowledge (1147a18 f.), even though he does not know the conclusion. For the cognitivist, Aristotle can succeed in making the latter point even if his examples (the young students, the drunks repeating their favourite proofs etc.) are not, in a central respect, similar to the distinctive knowledge failure of the weak *akrates*. Even if Aristotle does not show how the weak *akrates* can fail to know a conclusion which he sees as entailed by premises he knows, he may nonetheless suggest how to characterise the relevant case. No doubt, it will be said, more work is needed at the psychological level, involving perhaps the study of self-deception, to fill out the relevant description. But, it may be said, for Aristotle this is the task of an independent scientific (or physiological) investigation (see 1147b6 ff.).

This said, it remains, a weakness of this cognitivist interpretation that it simply assumes that, for Aristotle, it is possible to fail to know intellectually a conclusion which one arrives at by drawing an inference from known premises. It does nothing to explain how this is so. All Aristotle does (on this cognitivist account) is assert that this is what the weak *akrates* does (1147a33–35) and support his highly controversial claim by pointing (somewhat unhelpfully) to several considerably less problematic cases of cognitive failure (1147a10–24). If we are to be guided by charity, we should be inclined to doubt that Aristotle held the cognitivist picture and to look for an alternative interpretation of the predicament of his weak *akrates*.

Not all will agree with my assessment of the significance of the gap just noted. Many interpreters are firmly committed to a cognitivist picture of Aristotle's views of practical wisdom, self-control and *akrasia*. It runs as follows: the practically wise have a stable intellectual grasp of their conclusions; their emotions and contrary desires do not even provide them with conflicting reasons. The self-controlled do not have such a secure intellectual grasp since their emotions and desires provide them with reasons for acting against what they know to be

best. Despite this difference, their cognitive understanding of what is best to do leads both practically wise and self-controlled to act correctly. In neither case is their understanding undermined or subverted by the presence of contrary desires. By contrast, the weak *akrates* fails to understand the good conclusion because his cognitive grasp of the conclusion is somehow undermined, or warped, by the presence of conflicting desires. This failure of understanding lets the *akrates*'s desire prevail. Had there been no such failure of cognition, understanding (or knowledge) itself would have led to action, unless it had been impeded by some separate external factor. (I take this to be the pure cognitivist position: a version of impure cognitivism is discussed in section 6 below.) Given the attractiveness of this picture, some interpreters will conclude that, whatever the difficulties of Aristotle's detailed account of weak *akrasia*, he must have been aiming at an overall cognitivist picture of the relevant terrain. While there may be a gap in his theory at this point, it is precisely that: a gap in his basically cognitivist account.

One objection to the pure cognitivist interpretation runs as follows. Aristotle notes that for practical knowledge one needs both good reason and good desire (1139a24–26, 29–30, 32–34). For good reason one requires both a correct (true) argument (with true premises and true conclusion) and the intellect (*dianoia*: 1139a35–6) to grasp it. If practical knowledge requires both good reason and good desire, the latter is needed to put into practice the true conclusions of one's reasoning. But if desire as well as cognition is needed to account for the action of the practically wise, the failure of the *akrates* may be a failure of desire: the failure 'to pursue' (or put into practice) the conclusion of the good syllogism. If practical knowledge requires both correctness of intellect and correctness of desire, the *akrates* may lack such knowledge because she lacks correct desire. For the latter is needed to implement her cognitive grasp of the good conclusion. As elsewhere in Aristotle's account, it will be said, desire is essentially involved in the causation of action.

While this line of objection is attractive, it cannot be decisive. The pure cognitivist will reply that while Aristotle does indeed note that 'the intellect by itself moves nothing' (1139a35–6), he immediately adds that what does move us is 'goal-directed, practical intellect' (1139a36). For the pure cognitivist, what is needed for practical knowledge is correctness in *practical* intellect. On this view, having good intellectual desire consists simply in having correct practical beliefs. There is nothing more to correctness in such desires than correctness in practical cognition. Perhaps this is why Aristotle can describe preferential choice

(in this context) as either 'desiderative intellect' or 'intellectual desire' (1139b4–5). For both descriptions, properly understood, pick out the practical intellect. This can be described as a type of desire precisely because the relevant type of desire is form of cognition.

At this point, the pure cognitivist has to make explicit her commitment to the view that Aristotelian intellectual desire (preferential choice) is itself a form of cognition. This claim is, in my view, the weakest link in the cognitivist interpretation. If it can be shown to be mistaken, its removal will undermine a major basis for the cognitivist interpretation of Aristotle. But before considering this in more detail, I shall briefly consider the alternative Humean interpretation. For that too rests on a distinctive and controversial view of Aristotle's account of desire.

## 2. *The Knowledge Failure of the Weak Akrates (2): The Humean Interpretation*

Some, impressed by these criticisms of the cognitivist interpretation of Aristotelian practical knowledge, have suggested that we should represent such knowledge as involving two separate and independent components: good judgement and good desire. For these Humean interpreters, the practically wise will judge that a given course is best and also desire it appropriately. In their view, preferential choice is rightly described in *NE/EE* VI 2 as either 'intellectual desire' or 'desiderative nous' (1139b4–5) because it involves two separate components: good intellectual judgement and good desire. The latter is needed to ensure that the practically wise go after the object they have judged best in their reasoning. One can fail to have 'good desire' if one is attracted inappropriately towards another object. For then one will not desire to do the good action in the right way.<sup>9</sup> If so, the weak *akrates* can arrive at the judgement that it is best to flee, understand it fully at the cognitive level, and fail to act appropriately because she lacks the appropriate desire. On the Humean view, the weak *akrates* can exemplify what is sometimes called 'clear eyed *akrasia*'. His failure in practical knowledge is just failure in desire. It need not involve any failure of intellect.

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<sup>9</sup> One might suggest that 'good desire' means only the absence of opposed or blocking motivation. But this suggestion does not explain the requirement that desire 'go after' the same thing as reason suggests (1139a23–26). Nor does it account for Aristotle's description elsewhere of the preferential chooser as 'desiring to what they have judged in deliberation [as the thing to do]' (1113a11–12).

There are at several reasons for doubting that Aristotle held this type of view.

1. If this had been his view, it would (at best) have been very odd that he should have chosen to express it using an analogy with failures of intellectual knowledge: the drunkard repeating the verses of Empedokles, the young students, actors (1147a17–24). For the weak *akrates*, on the Humean view, is quite unlike any of these in one crucial respect. She knows that a given course is best, understands this perfectly and has a good grasp on the grounds for believing it. Further, she sees full well what is best and sincerely asserts this to be the case. Indeed, she is free of these types of intellectual failure. She should be regarded as like those who know (without any intellectual failure) what is the case rather than as like those who fail to know (in some way or other). More specifically, one would have expected her to be represented not as merely ‘saying’ the good conclusion (1147a34) but as asserting it in a knowledgeable way. For, on the Humean view, she is as well-placed to make this assertion as the self-controlled or the virtuous.

2. The first objection can be strengthened by considering a passage which might initially appear to support the Humean interpretation. In VII 10, Aristotle says that one is practically wise not merely by knowing but also by acting accordingly (1152a8–9). The *akrates* is said not to act, but nonetheless to be clever and good at reasoning (1152a10–13). This might suggest that the weak *akrates* gets to the good conclusion, knows it perfectly and still fails to act. However, Aristotle does not take this tack. He continues:

the *akrates* differs with regard to preferential choice—for he is not like a man who knows in the sense of actively contemplating, but rather is like one who is asleep or drunk. (1152a14–15)<sup>10</sup>

Here, the *akrates*’ failure with regard to preferential choice is said itself to be like a failure of intellectual knowledge. But, once again, the analogy is (at best) very weak if the *akrates* grasps the good conclusion perfectly (like one who knows in the active way) but still does not act accordingly. Worse still, in this context, Aristotle could easily have said that the weak *akrates* knows but does not act. Indeed, this is the way in which one might have thought his discussion was going. That

<sup>10</sup> Διαφέρειν δὲ κατὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν—οὐδὲ δὴ ὡς ὁ εἰδὼς καὶ θεωρῶν, ἀλλ’ ὡς ὁ καθεύδων ἢ οἰνωμένος.



Aristotle does not take this option at this point suggests that this is not his view.<sup>11</sup>

Both Humean and cognitivist interpreters views rest on (differing) accounts of Aristotle's view of desire. For the pure cognitivist, Aristotle takes desire to be a form of cognition (of the type one may find in any sphere of thought). For the Humean interpreter, by contrast, an Aristotelian desire for A is a separate, original existence, not to be assessed in terms of truth and falsity. It is perhaps to be conceived as simply a disposition to try to get A. In the next section, I shall argue that Aristotle held neither cognitivist nor Humean views of desire.

### 3. *The Third Way Introduced*

There is clearly space for an alternative position. Desire need not be identified *either* with cognition *or* with the second independent component of a cognition + desire pair. It could, rather, be a state distinct from, but analogous with, cognition which does not serve as the second independent member of a pair whose first member is cognition. On this view, to desire A is a distinctive way of seeing A as pleasant or good, which essentially involves (for example) the perceiver being attracted towards A (and perhaps taking pleasure in A). While such a state can be described as a way of seeing A, the way of seeing involved is directly connected with attraction and (perhaps) enjoyment and (as such) is different in kind from ordinary perception. Some have characterised this type of state as 'hot' cognition and contrasted with 'cold' cognition (as found in perception of e.g. shape, size, colour, ...).

Aristotle's remarks about desire in *De Anima* constitute, in my view, an attempt to spell out just such an account. Since I cannot establish this interpretation here, I shall (in this paper) sketch its outline and show its relevance for the discussion of *akrasia*.<sup>12</sup> Aristotle offers his most extended treatment of desire in *De Anima* III 7. He begins as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> What is required is a way in which the *akrates*'s failure with regard to preferential choice can itself be regarded as being like a failure of knowledge. It is not that Aristotle says that since there is a failure of preferential choice there must be a failure of knowledge (still less that because there is a failure in knowledge there must be a failure in desire). Rather, his point is that the failure in preferential choice is itself a failure in knowledge. For discussion of this issue, see Lawrence (1988).

<sup>12</sup> Its full defence is the task for a longer paper and another day.

Perceiving is like saying alone or thinking. But when [the object perceived] is pleasant or painful, [the perceptual soul], as it were asserting and denying, pursues or avoids [the object]. In fact, to feel pleasure and pain is to be active in a way which involves the perceptual mean towards what is good and bad, as such. Avoidance and pursuit are the same as this [viz. responding in the way specified] at least as far as the activity itself goes. Nor is the capacity for desire an aversion different either from each other or from the capacity for perception, although they can be described in different terms. (431a8–14)<sup>13</sup>

The second sentence contrasts what occurs when the object perceived is pleasant from cases of simple perception of (for example) special and common sensibles (and perhaps features such as heat and sweetness: 431a20–1). In the former case, there is something like assertion (a complex act) and the creature pursues the relevant object. But how precisely are the following phenomena related:

- (1) The object perceived being pleasant (to the perceiver),
- (2) The soul as it were asserting that it is pleasant,
- (3) The soul pursuing it.

The account, I believe, runs as follows: if the object is an actually perceived pleasant object, the perceiver will perceive it as such. If the perceiver perceives the object as pleasant, his soul has to respond to it as pleasant. To respond to it as pleasant is (in this case) the same activity as (1) taking pleasure in it and (2) pursuing it. Thus, there is one type of activity which can be described indifferently as ‘the object being perceived as pleasant’, ‘the soul as it were asserting that it is pleasant’, ‘the soul pursuing it’. Further, this activity is the same as that of taking pleasure in the object. It is an activity in which one is attracted towards the object in a way which involves taking pleasure in it.<sup>14</sup>

On this account, the relevant type of seeing is one which essentially involves taking pleasure in the object perceived. One cannot characterise what it is to see the object as pleasant without mentioning the

<sup>13</sup> Τὸ μὲν οὖν αἰσθάνεσθαι ὁμοιον τῷ φάναι μόνον καὶ νοεῖν· ὅταν δὲ ἡδὺ ἢ λυπηρόν, οἷον καταφᾶσα ἢ ἀποφᾶσα διώκει ἢ φεύγει· καὶ ἔστι τὸ ἡδεσθαι καὶ λυπεῖσθαι τὸ ἐνεργεῖν τῇ αἰσθητικῇ μεσότητι πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακόν, ἢ τοιαῦτα. καὶ ἡ φυγὴ δὲ καὶ ἡ ὀρεξις ταῦτό, ἢ κατ' ἐνέργειαν, καὶ οὐχ ἕτερον τὸ ὀρεκτικὸν καὶ τὸ φευκτικόν, οὔτ' ἀλλήλων οὔτε τοῦ αἰσθητικοῦ· ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶναι ἄλλο.

<sup>14</sup> I take it that Aristotle is identifying types and not only particular activities. For he speaks of seeing, enjoying, desiring and not this seeing, this desiring and this enjoying: 431a11–14. However, it should be noted that for present purposes, the weaker (particular identity) claim would suffice: this seeing that A is pleasant is this desiring A.

distinctive response to the object captured by the phrase 'being active towards the object on the basis of the perceptual mean', which Aristotle goes on to identify with taking pleasure in the presence of the object and being drawn towards it. If so, perceptual awareness of the object as pleasant essentially involves taking pleasure in and being drawn towards the object. It is a type of perception which essentially involves a distinctive response on the part of the perceiver. It registers the fact that the perceiver is attracted to A, not merely the fact that A has some (response-independent) feature (such as being hot or large). There is no characterising what it is to see A as pleasant without mentioning this distinctive form of response to it. If so, desiring A or perceiving A as pleasant cannot be characterised solely in terms of the type of response-independent cognition of the object suggested in the cognitive account.

Aristotle extends his account of the desire for pleasure to the case of intellectual desires for the good. Thus, he writes a few lines below:

In the case of the intellect, images take the place of percepts, and when the soul asserts or denies that the thing is good or bad, it pursues or avoids. (431a14–16)<sup>15</sup>

If the analogy with perceptually based desire for pleasure is maintained, the following three descriptions:

- (1) The object imagined being good (to the imaginer/thinker),
- (2) The soul as it were asserting that it is good,
- (3) The soul pursuing it

will all refer to the same type of activity, an activity in which one is drawn towards the object. If so, to have an intellectual desire for A will not merely be to attend to the fact that A has a good making feature, but also involve being affected by A in such a way as to be attracted towards it. One cannot characterise what is involved in intellectually desiring A without reference to the fact that one is affected by A in this way. To assert that A is good involves in its nature being drawn towards A, and does not consist solely in noting A's possession of a given feature. If the analogy with the perception of pleasure is strictly maintained, one will not be able to characterise the way in which the agent is drawn to the object he pursues without mentioning the fact

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<sup>15</sup> Τῇ δὲ διανοητικῇ ψυχῇ τὰ φαντάσματα οἷον αἰσθήματα ὑπάρχει, ὅταν δὲ ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν φήσῃ ἢ ἀποφύσῃ, φεύγει ἢ διώκει.

that he pleasurably attends to it (e.g. finds the prospect of possessing it enjoyable or appealing). But one is not required to interpret this analogy so strictly. What is crucial is that the person who sees the object as good is attracted towards it. Even if attraction is not to be spelled out in terms of pleasurable attention, the type of attraction may still be vulnerable to the operation of pleasure and pain. For they can affect the perceiver so as to make him no longer attracted to the object, and so no longer desire it or see it as good.

If this is correct, there will be more to desire for the good (in Aristotle's account) than merely the type of cognition found in response-independent areas of thought. It cannot be analysed solely as the cognition (or belief) that something is good, if the cognition (or belief) in question is of precisely the same type as is found in factual matters not essentially connected with being attracted to the object. There is more to Aristotelian practical knowledge than ordinary intellectual cognition of value. Desire for the good introduces some further distinctive ingredients over and above those allowed for in the cognitivist, Socratic, account.

Aristotle's picture of desire differs also from Hume's. In *De Anima* III 7 (as interpreted above), there are not two independent, ontologically separate, states of desire and cognition. Perception of pleasure does not produce a further desire (as in the Humean account). Rather to see the object as pleasant essentially involves being attracted to it in a way which involves taking pleasure in it (or the prospect of having it). Desiring something is a distinctive way of seeing it, albeit one that cannot be understood without reference to the fact that one is attracted to the object in question. There are not two independent, separable, components at work in Aristotle's account.

This picture of what it is to desire the good is at work in Aristotle's discussion in *De Anima* III 10. Initially, it appears that desire and practical intellect can both move us to act (433a14–16), but Aristotle concludes that this is not the case (433a22–24: see the emphatic 'as things are...') and that practical intellect cannot move us without desire. His conclusion is based on the thought that the starting point for practical intellect is what is desired (433a20), so that practical intellect is to be understood as type of sensitivity to what is attractive (or desired). But how does the conclusion follow? Why cannot the practical intellect move without desire? Against the background of *De Anima* III 7, one can see why this is so. To grasp that something is good essentially involves being attracted towards it, being moved by its good-making features. This is

why 'when we are moved to act by rational thought, we are moved by rational desire' (433a23–25). The presence of the rational thought that something is good essentially involves being attracted towards the relevant features of the object. Here too, desire is not an independent component super-added after the practical intellect has done its work. It is rather something which has to be present when the practical intellect is sensitive (in this distinctive way) to the desirability of the object. Indeed, its presence is part of what it is to be sensitive to the desirability of the object in the required way.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. *The third way applied to NE/EE VI and VII*

The interpretation of desire (in *De Anima*) outlined in the previous section offers a satisfying way to understand some of Aristotle's remarks about practical knowledge and *akrasia* in *NE/EE* VI and VII. Indeed, the interpretation it suggests has advantages not shared by its more traditional cognitivist and Humean rivals. Or so I shall now suggest.

1. Aristotle describes preferential choice as either 'desiderative *nous* or intellectual desire' (1139b4–5). On the present account, preferential choice will be understood either as a form of cognition (albeit of the distinctive desiderative) or as a form of desire, which involves cognition as to what is best to do. Crucially, it cannot be assimilated either to pure cognition (because of its connections with attraction and action) or to perceptual-pleasure based desire (because of its connections with rational sensitivity). Given these two sets of connection, preferential choice is a distinctive form of both cognition and desire, not a compound of ordinary cognition and low-level (let alone non-cognitive) desire. So understood, a preferential choice will be faulty if the agent is not properly attracted to doing what is best. This view explains why in *NE/EE* VII 10, 1152a13–16, Aristotle describes the weak *akrates* as both failing in preferential desire and being like one who fails in cognition. Her failure is not simply just one in cognition (see Aristotle's emphasis on the role of preferential desire) nor simply one in desire

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<sup>16</sup> Nor is rational desire present if the agent thinks rationally and takes the further rational step of desiring in line with rational thought. For that would not explain why rational desire is there from the beginning of the process nor why when one is apt to move in accordance with rational thought one is apt to move in accordance with rational desire (i.e. why one cannot have rational thought pushing us in one direction without any support from rational desire: see 433a23–5).

(witness his comparison with a failure in cognition). Rather, her failure is a failure in the distinctive form of rational sensitivity to value which leads to action.

2. Aristotle's analogy between the knowledge failure of the weak *akrates* and that of the young students or the drunk man repeating the verses of Empedokles proved problematic for both the pure cognitivist and Humean interpretation. On the view presently under discussion, the weak *akrates* does not see correctly the best thing to do, but her failure registers the fact that she is not properly attracted by the goodness of the action she sets herself to do. As such, her fault can be described either as a fault in desire or in grasp of the relevant conclusion. If there is something amiss with her perception of what is best to do, there will therein be a failure in her preferential desire.

Can Aristotle's analogy be made more precise? Like the young students, the *akrates* has failed to make the arguments or good conclusion 'part of herself' (1147a22). For she has failed to accept them in the appropriate way. Her failure consists in her not responding appropriately to the values with which she engages. This failure can be represented as a failure on her part to see what is the best thing to do, provided that the type of seeing in question is distinguished from all forms of cognition not so connected with being attracted to act in a given way. Perhaps like the drunk she can be said not fully to understand what she says, provided that her failure of understanding is interpreted as essentially involving a failure to be properly attracted to doing what she says she should do. While one can say that the weak *akrates* does not 'fully understand' or 'sincerely believe' the good conclusion, the relevant type of failure is not the one to which these phrases would be attached in cases involving ordinary cognition of response-independent features of objects (such as its being a five foot, grey, dolphin).

The weak *akrates*, on this proposal, will know (in the response-involving way) what her goal is and will also know intellectually that her goal requires her to  $\Phi$ , but she will fail to know in the appropriate way that it is best to  $\Phi$ . Had she known that (in the appropriate response-involving way), she would have acted. In this model, one can see why the *akrates* can be said to fail to know (in the appropriate way) that it is best to  $\Phi$ . For, while the distinctive mode of seeing is concerned with the truth about what is best to do, it is not constituted (as ordinary cognition is) simply by its attachment to truth or governed solely by rational argument. For seeing something as good or pleasant essentially involves

being (appropriately) attracted to doing what is good (or pleasant).<sup>17</sup> The latter mode of seeing may involve taking pleasure in doing what is good (in the case of the virtuous agent) or a commitment to acting in this way (in the case of the self-controlled). But, in the general case, one can fail to grasp the good conclusion appropriately if one is not attracted to doing what is good in either of these ways. This mode of seeing requires for success not just that one grasps what is true (in a way constrained by rational argument) but also that one is properly attracted to doing what is good. For only in this case will the goal of good action be achieved (1139a34, b2).

So understood, the weak *akrates*' failure is readily comprehensible. It is not the simple failure in cognition posited (but not explained) by the cognitivist interpreter. Rather, the weak *akrates*' failure to grasp the good conclusion consists in her not being properly attracted to doing what she concludes should be done. Her failure is the result of the operation of a number of factors which diminish the attractiveness for her of doing what she thinks she should. Other desires (as well as loss of nerve or diminished enthusiasm) can affect her in this way, making her less drawn to doing what is still, by her own lights, the better course. This is how the weak *akrates*'s sensual desire can undermine her practical knowledge of the conclusion (1147a33–4). Its presence results in her less being less drawn to doing what she takes to be the best action and more attracted to an alternative, less good, action. If practical knowledge of the good conclusion involves not merely arriving at the good conclusion but also being drawn to act on it, it can be undermined by factors which do not make the weak *akrates* doubt its truth.

Against this background, one can see why *akrasia* can occur without either self-deception or gross intellectual failure. For the distinctive mode of acceptance required for a practical conclusion is, in its nature, vulnerable to the operation of factors such as countervailing desires. In this it differs from the type of cognition and response-independent forms of judgement found in theoretical reasoning. So understood, it should no longer be a surprise that Aristotle fails to provide (in 1147a10–24) a theoretical example precisely analogous to the failure of the weak

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<sup>17</sup> This account serves to explain why Aristotle can regard 'desire as taking the place of questioning or thinking' in the case of the practical syllogism (*De Motu* 701a31–32). For in this context, it is desire (and not thought) that accepts the relevant conclusion. Thought would be required in non-practical, theoretical, reasoning.

*akrates*. For the latter can only occur among the distinctive types of state characteristic of practical reasoning. This is why it emerges in Aristotle's discussion only when he turns from general (or logical) discussion to one which focuses on the distinctive causes involved in *akrasia* ('physical': see 1147a24 ff.).<sup>18</sup>

3. Aristotle sometimes speaks of strong, excessive desires as leading the (weak) *akrates* astray (1150b7, 19–21, 1148a20–23, 1102b16–18). How are these connected with her failure of knowledge? On the present account, the *akrates*'s having strong or excessive desires will be the same state as her being prone to follow his imagination, when that suggests that she do something which he knows is not the best thing to do. This is why Aristotle can describe various types of *akrates* as being led away by the speed or strength of desire *and* as being prone to follow their imagination (1150b25–28). For the state in which their desires are strong or excessive is the one in which they are drawn to act on what strikes them as pleasant rather than on what they take to be best. In the latter passage, there is no suggestion that having strong desires causes the *akrates* follow his imagination (as in a Humean account) nor that his proneness to follow his imagination causes his desires to be strong (as in the cognitivist one). More generally, this passage does not indicate that the weak *akrates*'s actions are simply either the outcome of a battle of desires (which makes him prone to follow his imagination) or the result of cognitive failure (which lets desires in). Rather, 'having strong desires' and 'being prone to follow his imagination' seem both to be alternative descriptions of one and the same state. (There is no need to invoke the hydraulic, battle of forces, picture of *akrasia*, much derided by recent cognitivist writers, to account for Aristotle's talk of 'strong desires'.)<sup>19</sup>

### 5. *Some replies considered*

The basic contention of this paper has been conditional in form. I have argued that *if* Aristotle adopted a certain view of desire in *De Anima*, *then* he could account for the knowledge failure of the weak *akrates* and

<sup>18</sup> In both 'hot' and 'cold' cognition, desires may adversely affect one's knowledge. There may indeed be a common account at the physiological level of how they cease to do so (1147b6–9). But it does not follow from this that the type of cognition involved in the two cases is the same.

<sup>19</sup> See McDowell (1978).



the success of the practically wise in a way other than that proposed by either cognitivist or Humean interpreter.

I have further suggested that this (third) way of understanding his remarks in *NE/EE* VI and VII makes good sense of some of them, indeed better sense than its more traditional rivals. However, since I have not in this paper secured the antecedent of this conditional, my defence of the third way is incomplete. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile considering four objections to the general strategy I have sketched. Perhaps it can be shown to be misconceived at the outset.

a. *One Humean response*

Some will suspect that my interpretation of Aristotle's weak *akrates* must be a notational variant of the Humean story. Isn't this really the traditional dual-component story in disguise? Surely, on your account, it will be said, the weak *akrates* knows intellectually full well that A is best, and merely fails to connect this knowledge with some separate state (e.g. desire), which the self-controlled and virtuous possess? If so, in her case, there will be two independent components, only one of which (cognition) is possessed by the *akrates*.

The Humean diagnosis of the condition of Aristotle's weak *akrates* is not mandatory. The distinctive form of seeing what is best to do (characteristic of the virtuous) need not be decomposed into Hume's two independent components: cognition + desire. For the type of cognition involved (in judging A to be best) essentially involves the agent being somewhat attracted to doing A. If she is virtuous, and sees clearly what is best to do, she will be appropriately attracted to the action. One cannot specify what the relevant mode of cognition is without reference to her being attracted to action in this way. When the virtuous assert that A is best (in this way), their assertion is the expression of this distinctive form of cognition. The latter need not be an amalgam of ordinary cognition and a further desiderative state. Similarly, when the weak *akrates* fails to see clearly that A is best, she is not merely 'coldly' cognising that A is best.<sup>20</sup> Rather, she may be in a distinctive

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<sup>20</sup> It may, on occasion, be possible to coldly cognise that A is best (outside the area of thought about what one should do: 1143a7–15). But in such cases, one is thinking not about what it is best to do for oneself or for the group to which one belongs. Rather, one thinking about what it is best for someone else to do or to have done. However, since practical wisdom differs from goodness in understanding as to its domain, there is no reason to regard practical wisdom as goodness in intelligence + desire.

failed state, which as Aristotle suggests, stands to the practical assertion of the virtuous (or self-controlled) as saying stands to ordinary assertion. This is why she can be accurately described as like one who says (rather than asserts).<sup>21</sup>

b. *An impure cognitivist reply*

Another reply runs as follows: 'in your earlier discussion you introduced the pure cognitivist, for whom intellectual desire was just a form of cognition. But not all cognitivists share this view. For some impure cognitivists, practical knowledge involves cognition and desire, where the desire automatically and necessarily attends the prior cognition. More specifically, in this account, desire is present in the explanation of action but its presence and nature are completely determined by the nature of the relevant cognition. If the cognition is good (qua cognition), the resulting desire will be good and action will follow. The goodness of the desire is determined by the nature of the relevant cognition. Nothing has been said to exclude the possibility that Aristotle was an impure cognitivist of this type'.

For an impure cognitivist, it is essential that the cognitive component remain pure. It is not itself to be characterised as a form of being attracted to the object (for otherwise this position is just a version of the third way just outlined). The impurity of the position consists in the addition of a further dependent desire controlled in its nature by the cognition. (Intellectual desire is definitionally dependent on the cognition but not vice versa.)

There are several problems with this suggestion. First, at the exegetical level, it runs contrary to the account of sensual and intellectual desire sketched offered above (on the basis of *De Anima* III 7 and 10), in which seeing something as pleasant or good was itself to be characterised (in part) in terms of being attracted to the object. Second, it faces a serious philosophical hurdle: it needs to explain why desire attends cognition

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<sup>21</sup> A similar point can be made about the relation of assertion to saying: there is no need to regard assertion as two separate acts, an act of saying + an act of committing oneself to the truth of what is said. For one may not be able to characterise the type of saying involved in this case except in terms of its connections with assertion. While in other cases one may detect pretend-sayings or conjectures, these will be different from those sayings which are abstracted from assertion. It is false arithmetic to conclude from the fact that failed assertions are sayings that assertions have to be analysed as sayings + something else.

in this way? It appears to be a brute and unexplained modal fact that this is so, not something which has been made intelligible to us. If this had been Aristotle's view, he should have sought to explain why good desire must attend good cognition in this way. But nothing of this type is offered even in *NE/EE* VI 2 where it is most needed. This is why it seems more plausible to think that if Aristotle was a cognitivist, he was a pure cognitivist, for whom desire is itself a form of cognition.

c. *An alternative cognitivist reply*

The interpretation offered in Section 4 of intellectual desire in *De Anima* III 7 turns on the claim that it, as well as sensual desire, essentially involves the agent being affected by the object he sees as good (where being so affected is an ingredient in his seeing it as good). But why take the comparison with the case of sensual desire so strictly? Why build a response of this type into the account of what it is to see something as good? Isn't it enough that in the case of intellectual desire the agent sees A as good and as a necessary result acts accordingly?

In an immediate reply, one might note that an affirmative answer to the last question not merely weakens the analogy with sensual desire but also leaves unexplained why clear perception is necessarily connected with action in the way specified. This connection is left a brute necessity, and no explanation is given of why it obtains or of why the weak *akrates* must fail to see clearly what is best to do. This type of view merely labels her failure as one of perception without explaining why such a failure has this result. A longer reply would require is to consider how far the cognitivist can adequately capture Aristotle's distinction between the self-controlled and the virtuous. Perhaps Aristotle needs to invoke the role of being properly affected by what is seen as good to draw the relevant distinction. But that larger task lies outside the scope of the present essay.<sup>22</sup>

## 6. *A final methodological question*

The argument of this paper rests on interpreting Aristotle's account of practical knowledge and *akrasia* in *NE/EE* VI and VII on the basis of his views in desire in *De Anima*. Thus, I have argued that several of

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<sup>22</sup> For some arguments on this point, see Charles (1995).

Aristotle's remarks on these topics in the *Ethics* become fully comprehensible and more readily defensible against the background of his discussion of desire in *De Anima*. But is this approach legitimate? Is it appropriate to employ an account of desire drawn from his scientific works in analysing his treatment of related topics in the *Ethics*, a non-scientific treatise? Perhaps, in the latter Aristotle intended to remain neutral on precisely the explanatory issues which divide cognitivist, Humean and third way interpreters. Maybe his aim there was to present only so much of his view of *akrasia* as was necessary for the purposes of the *Ethics*.<sup>23</sup>

These methodological issues are important but understudied. There are, as indicated in section 1, two separable questions:

[A] What were Aristotle's own full views on *akrasia*?

[B] What position did he explicitly take on *akrasia* in the *Ethics*?

Even if an answer to [A] involves the account of desire set out above, an answer to [B] need not.

The present paper attempts to answer the former rather than the latter question. But is this a legitimate goal? Should Aristotle's remarks on these issues be seen as forming a unified story at all? I shall merely sketch a line of reply to these large questions.<sup>24</sup>

In discussing *akrasia* Aristotle considers the phenomenon '*physically*' as well as presumably logically (in discussing how practical reasoning leads to action (1147a25–31), the role of the syllogisms (1147a31–34) and the variety of causal principles specific to the case at hand (1147a34–5). Thus he invokes a scientific account of the causes at work and goes beyond his earlier non-physical account. He must intend his earlier discussion to be consistent with this scientific account of the matter. There are not, it appears, two incommensurable accounts of *akrasia* offered in VII 3. Rather, Aristotle uses the scientific material to make more determinate the logical account of the phenomenon offered earlier in that chapter. It seems that a full understanding of *akrasia* requires material drawn from a scientific account of the subject matter.

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that this neutralist interpretation does not favour the cognitivist account of *akrasia*. Indeed, the neutralist account is (as its name suggests) neutral between the cognitivist, Humean and third way understanding of practical knowledge and *akrasia* in the *Ethics*. Nor does the neutralist account commit Aristotle to the idea that practical knowledge cannot be analysed in any of these ways. It requires only that no such analysis is required for the purposes of the *Ethics*.

<sup>24</sup> I intend to return to these issues in more detail elsewhere.

If Aristotle invokes scientific material concerning one kind of desire (*epithumia*) and the practical syllogism in this way, his discussion of them should be consistent with his account of desire and the explanation of action in *De Motu* and *De Anima*. Indeed, the latter should provide material relevant to a full understanding of *akrasia* and related phenomena. For, according to *NE/EE* VII 3, the physical and logical levels should form an integrated whole which between them offer the fullest and deepest account of the subject matter. That there is an integrated account of this type is the assumption on which this paper rests.

These last remarks are consistent with accepting the following claim of the neutralist interpreter of *NE/EE* VII 3:

[NC] Aristotle intended his discussion in this chapter to be comprehensible without familiarity with or commitment to his own scientific account of desire.

For [NC] can be true even if Aristotle thought that a full understanding of his remarks in the *Ethics* can only be achieved by one who had mastered its proper scientific basis. While the *Ethics* discussion (or parts of it) may be comprehensible in some measure without the account of desire proposed in *De Anima*, it can only be fully understood and justified in the light of the latter. The more general audience who attended the *Ethics* lectures did not need, for their purposes, to grasp the full scientific basis of Aristotle's views.<sup>25</sup> However, while they could have come away from this lecture course with a reasonable understanding of the topics discussed, they would not have fully understood either Aristotle's own grounds for his views or (in some cases) precisely what he intended by key phrases as 'desiderative intellect', 'intellectual desire', 'like a failure in knowledge'. It is only when one grasps his account of desire and practical knowledge that the distinctive nature and commitments of such phrases are fully revealed (see section 5). The neutralism of the *Ethics*, so understood, in no way excludes the possibility that some of its doctrines rest in part on a scientific account of the relevant phenomenon (even when the latter need not be deployed to secure the more limited goals of the *Ethics*).

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<sup>25</sup> For indications of the limited goals in the *Ethics* see Aristotle's remarks at *NE/EE* VII.1, 1145b2–7 concerning what counts as adequate proof in the present context. On the demands of the present context see, for example, *NE* I 7, 1098a28–32. *Ethics* seems to be more like building than geometry.

*Conclusions*

Aristotle's full picture of *akrasia* and practical knowledge is (or so I have suggested) an original and distinctive one, occupying a logical space not visible to those for whom the only conceivable theories are either cognitivist or Humean. It rests on an account of desire, presented in *De Anima*, which is not to be assimilated to that favoured by either the cognitivist or the Humean. More needs to be said about Aristotle's distinctive view of desire and of its connections with practical reasoning. But if this general account can be sustained, Aristotle's approach to *akrasia* should be seen as a striking alternative to its traditional, better known and deeply problematic rivals.

## AKRASIA AND ENKRATEIA IN ANCIENT STOICISM: MINOR VICE AND MINOR VIRTUE?\*

JEAN-BAPTISTE GOURINAT

At first glance, the case of *akrasia* in Ancient Stoicism is quickly closed: the word is found twice in the *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, while the word *akratês* may be found once, and *akrasia* again may be found twice in Epictetus<sup>1</sup> and nowhere in Marcus Aurelius.<sup>2</sup> One may try to persuade oneself that the ten or so occurrences of *impotens* and *impotentia* in Seneca refer to *akrasia*, but, in fact, this is rather unlikely. This situation is echoed by the quasi-absence of the word in classical or recent accounts of Stoic ethics: the word occurs once in Dyroff's classic study,<sup>3</sup> never appears in Max Forschner's *Die stoische Ethik*,<sup>4</sup> and Brad Inwood, in *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, shows excellently that the phenomenon of weak will was rejected by the Stoics.<sup>5</sup> *Akrasia* evidently does not play in Stoic ethics the central role it plays in Aristotelian ethics, for instance. The reason for this is clear: *akrasia* implies a conflict between two parts of the soul, a rational part and an irrational one, the weakness of the rational part being unable to dominate the irrational one. But the Stoics

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\* I am very grateful to Pierre Destrée for convincing me to work on this topic, which, at first, seemed to me of no great pertinence for Stoic thought. This paper will show, I hope, that the matter is more important than it may seem to be, and that Pierre Destrée was well inspired. I have greatly benefited from comments from the participants at the Louvain meeting, and also from work on Zeno's theory of virtues during the meetings of the 'Projet Zénon', of which I am in charge, at the Centre Léon Robin, in Paris. Special thanks are due on that occasion to Michel Gourinat. I am also very grateful to Thomas Bénatouil for written comments on an earlier draft of this paper, especially on the section about Cleanthes. And finally, I express my gratitude to John Thompson, for kindly checking my English.

<sup>1</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, II, 16, 45; 18, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ἐγκράτεια appears once in Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, VIII, 39, and ἐγκρατής in VI, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Dyroff (1897), 88. Dyroff only remarks that *akrasia* is a subordinate vice, and provides no further comment.

<sup>4</sup> Forschner (1995).

<sup>5</sup> Inwood (1985), 132–9.

deny the existence of an irrational part of the soul, and therefore they deny the possibility of *akrasia*.<sup>6</sup>

The only occurrences of *akrasia* in the *SVF* may be found in Stoic lists of vices.<sup>7</sup> *Akrasia* is one among many of the vices (19) subordinated to the four main vices. Hence, there is almost nothing upon which to reconstruct a Stoic doctrine of *akrasia*. Paradoxically enough, there are papers dedicated to Stoic *akrasia*.<sup>8</sup> However, it is not surprising that these articles usually develop their own concept of *akrasia*, or Aristotle's concept, and apply it to Stoic philosophy, without mentioning the few ancient testimonies on Stoicism or the few Stoic texts where *akrasia* may be found. Then recently, in his book on ancient theories of emotions, Richard Sorabji, without stressing his own originality, gave a central position to *akrasia* in his analysis of Stoic theory of emotion.<sup>9</sup> The centrality of *akrasia* in Sorabji's overview is due to the fact that emotional states are said be *akrateis*<sup>10</sup> by Chrysippus: Sorabji takes this to mean that *akrasia* is central to Chrysippus' definition of emotion. In his extensive book on Chrysippus' *On passions* (*Peri pathôn*), Teun Tieleman also admits in passing that emotion may be explained by Chrysippus in terms of *akrasia*.<sup>11</sup> This is worth noticing, considering Tieleman's general lack of indulgence for Sorabji's method and interpretation. The presence of *akrasia*, or, at least, of *akrateis* states of mind, in Chrysippus' analysis of emotion, shows that it is necessary to re-evaluate the place of *akrasia* in Stoic ethics, despite the discouraging initial evidence of the sources. In fact, despite the manifestly minor importance of *akrasia* for the Stoics, two elements plead in favour of a positive re-evaluation of the status of *akrasia* in Stoicism: the presence of the notion in Chrysippus' analysis of emotion; the importance of the opposite notion, *enkrateia*, in Cleanthes' theory of virtues, since he considers *enkrateia* as one of his four cardinal virtues, among which *enkrateia* takes the place traditionally assigned to *phronêsis*. Given the scant evidence on *akrasia* in the remaining sources, and the ordinary coupling of the two notions, it seems appropriate to examine *akrasia* with *enkrateia*.

<sup>6</sup> Inwood (1985), 137. Note that Plutarch, *Virt. Mor.*, 7, 446F (*SVF* III 459, Long-Sedley 65 G) explicitly says that the Stoics denied any conflict in the soul.

<sup>7</sup> As noted by Dyroff (1897), 88 and Inwood (1985), 137.

<sup>8</sup> Gosling (1987); Joyce (1995).

<sup>9</sup> Sorabji (2000), especially chap. 3 and chap. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Galen, *Plac. Hipp. Plat.*, IV, 4, 24, p. 256 De Lacy; cf. Sorabji (2000), 303.

<sup>11</sup> Tieleman (2003), 172; 300–01.



## 1. Akrasia and enkrateia in standard Stoicism

In the first section of this paper, I shall examine what I call for the time being ‘standard Stoicism’. By this expression, I mean Stoicism as it is presented in doxographic or polemical sources, without any mention by name of an individual author to whom this doctrine may be attributed. In such cases, our sources ascribe the doctrine presented to ‘the Stoics’ or ‘the Stoa’.<sup>12</sup> This corresponds to what Arnim in his edition has called ‘*doctrina generalis Stoicorum*’, and has ‘composed’ or mixed with the fragments of Chrysippus.<sup>13</sup> This type of doctrine is what was known and put forth in Antiquity as ‘Stoicism’: in many cases, it could derive from Chrysippus’ standard doctrines, but it is in fact what was commonly found in handbooks between the 1st century B.C. and late Antiquity, and was not based directly on Chrysippus’ works. Hence, in those expositions of Stoic doctrine, Chrysippus’ doctrines were presumably conflated with later transformations or adaptations of the doctrine.

a. *The place of akrasia and enkrateia among virtues and vices*

*Akrasia* and *enkrateia* are defined in the two main classical lists of Stoic virtues and vices, Diogenes Laertius VII, 92–93 (*SVF* III 265) and Stobaeus, *Eclogae*, II, 7, p. 60, 9 ff. Wachsmuth (*SVF* III 264). According to the scholarly *communis opinio*, the Stobaeian passage is an extract from what is known as Arius’ doxography on Stoic ethics.<sup>14</sup> These

<sup>12</sup> Or, as is the case in Stobaeus, to ‘Zeno and the other Stoics’ (Stob., *Eclog.*, II, 7, p. 57, 13–4 W.). This is also the case in Diogenes Laertius, where the whole exposition of the Stoic system is included in the life of Zeno. In such cases, Zeno is a ‘name label’, and it is difficult to trace a clear separation between what was actually zenonian, and what was added by later Stoic writers. See Algra (2002) on that issue.

<sup>13</sup> See *SVF*, vol. II, 13, ‘*Chrysippi Placita cum generali stoicorum doctrina composita*’. See also vol. I, p. v: *moneo lectores, ne ea omnia, quae hoc tertio locorum genere complexus sum, pro veris et propriis Chrysippi fragmentis a me vendi arbitrentur*.

<sup>14</sup> In the long chapter of Stobaeus’ *Eclogae* which is devoted to Stoic ethics (II, 7), the name of Arius does not appear, but the chapter has been attributed to him by Heeren (1801), 191–2, Meineke (1859) and Diels (1879), 69–88, on the basis of similarities with the following section (on Aristotelian ethics), of which a passage (II, 7, 129, 19–130, 12) is later quoted as an extract from Arius Didymus’ *Epitome* (*Eclog.*, IV, 39, p. 918, 15: ἐκ τῆς Διδύμου ἐπιτομῆς). This attribution was accepted by Wachsmuth in his edition of Stobaeus and has not been challenged since. On Arius’ ethical doxography, see Fortenbaugh (1983), Hahm (1990), Göransson (1995), and now Viano (2005). Arius Didymus the doxographer is usually identified to Arius, friend, counsellor and Stoic teacher of Augustus. This identification has been questioned by Göransson (1995),

two lists make distinctions between ‘primary’ (*prôtai*) virtues and vices and ‘subordinate’ (*hupotetagmenai*) virtues and vices. In both texts, there are four couples of primary virtues and vices: *phronêsis* (prudence) and *aphrosunê* (imprudence), *andreia* (courage) and *deilia* (cowardice), *dikaio-sunê* (justice) and *adikia* (injustice), *sôphrosunê* (moderation) and *akolasia* (intemperance). But there are some differences between the two texts. Diogenes Laertius does not explain to which of the primary virtues subordinate virtues are subordinated, while Stobaeus does list the subordinate virtues after the primary virtues on which they depend. Diogenes Laertius mentions only 5 subordinate virtues, but Stobaeus mentions 19. Only in Diogenes Laertius one may find a non-exhaustive list of three subordinate vices, while no subordinate vice is reported by Stobaeus. Lastly, Diogenes Laertius reports technical definitions for the primary virtues (but not for the primary vices), while the Stobaeian passage gives technical and non-technical definitions of primary virtues and also technical definitions of the secondary virtues. Given that those differences are relatively minor, it may be assumed that the two texts belong to a similar doxographic tradition, but they cannot derive from each other, especially since the (presumably) more recent of the two texts, that of Diogenes (if one admits that Stobaeus’ text is an extract from Arius), contains some details (notably the list of three subordinate vices) which one cannot find in the older text.

The four primary virtues are defined in both texts as sciences (*epistêmai*). The text of Diogenes Laertius is lacunary. This is why it is completed in Marcovich’s recent edition by the parallel text in Stobaeus and from Pseudo-Andronicos’ *De affectibus*:<sup>15</sup>

Prudence is the science of things that are bad, good and neutral; justice is the science <concerned with distributing according to everyone’s value; moderation is the science> of what should be chosen and avoided and of

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203–18, but this criticism of the traditional identification has not been universally accepted: see e.g. Inwood (1996) and Natali (1999), xiv. For English translations of Arius Didymus, see Inwood-Gerson (1997) and Pomeroy (1999). I shall not discuss the authorship of ‘Arius’ doxography, but use the name of Stobaeus for reasons of convenience, since quotations from Arius necessarily refer to Wachsmuth’s edition of Stobaeus. The reader may read ‘Arius’ when I write ‘Stobaeus’.

<sup>15</sup> These definitions are clearly not zenonian, since Zeno defined the three primary virtues other than *phronêsis* itself as *phronêseis*: for instance, justice is *phronesis* concerning distribution (Plut., *Stoic. Repugn.*, 7, 1034 C = *SVF* I 200). Cleanthes gives a more ‘physical’ definition of virtue, as will be argued below. Hence, this list of definitions is presumably Chrysippean.

neutral [actions]; <courage is the science of things that are fearsome and not fearsome and neither of these>. (D.L. VII, 92 = *SVF* III 265)<sup>16</sup>

The definition of virtues as sciences means that, according to the Stoics, it is necessary to know certain things in order to be disposed to act in a perfect way. This is why every virtue is both knowledge (science) and a certain kind of disposition of man's soul. Except for the definition of justice, all the definitions have a three-fold object: *a*, non-*a*, and what is neither *a* nor non-*a*. This three-fold structure is characteristic of Stoic definitions of virtues when virtues are defined as sciences.<sup>17</sup> This is not necessarily the case with the definitions of subordinate virtues in Diogenes Laertius: most of them are defined as both *epistêmê* (science) and *hexis* (enduring capacity), some are characterised only by one of these words, and one is both an *hexis* and a disposition (*diathesis*). No such variation may be found in Stobaeus, where only the notion of 'science' may be found.

*Akrasia* may be found only in Diogenes' list, where it is mentioned as a subordinate vice, without specifying to which primary vice it is subordinated:

Among vices, some are primary, others subordinated to these: for instance, imprudence, cowardice, injustice, and intemperance are among the primary vices, while incontinence, slow-wittedness and bad decision are subordinated to these; vice is ignorance of those things of which virtue is science. (D.L. VII, 93 = *SVF* III 265)<sup>18</sup>

No definition of *akrasia* is given. *Enkrateia*, on the other hand, appears in both texts as a subordinate virtue, and Diogenes provides its definition. Only five subordinate virtues are mentioned by Diogenes Laertius (*karteria*, *megalopsuchia*, *euboulia*, *ankhinoia* and *enkrateia*), while a full list of 19 subordinate virtues is available in Stobaeus, who also explains to which of the primary virtues each of the subordinate virtue is subordinated:

<sup>16</sup> Καὶ τὴν μὲν φρόνησιν εἶναι ἐπιστήμην κακῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν καὶ οὐδετέρων· τὴν δὲ δικαιοσύνην ἐπιστήμην <ἀπονεμητικὴν τοῦ κατ' ἀξίαν ἐκάστω· τὴν δὲ σωφροσύνην ἐπιστήμην> ὧν αἰρετέον καὶ εὐλαβητέον καὶ οὐδετέρων· <τὴν δὲ ἀνδρείαν ἐπιστήμην δεινῶν καὶ οὐ δεινῶν καὶ οὐδετέρων>. Compare with Stobaeus, II, p. 59, 4 ff. W. (*SVF* III 262 = 61 F Long-Sedley).

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g. Posidonius' definition of dialectic as the 'science of things that are true and false and neither of these' (D.L. VII, 62 = *FDS* 63 = Posid. F 188 E.-K.).

<sup>18</sup> Τῶν κακιῶν τὰς μὲν εἶναι πρώτας, τὰς δ' ὑπὸ ταύτας· οἷον ἀφροσύνην μὲν καὶ δειλίαν καὶ ἀδικίαν καὶ ἀκολασίαν ἐν ταῖς πρώταις, ἀκρασίαν δὲ καὶ βραδύνοιαν καὶ κακοβουλίαν ἐν ταῖς ὑπὸ ταύτας· εἶναι δ' ἀγνοίας τὰς κακίας, ὧν αἱ ἀρεταὶ ἐπιστήμαι.

Of the virtues which are subordinate to these, some are subordinate to prudence, others to moderation, others to courage, others to justice. To prudence are subordinated good sense, good reasoning, shrewdness, moral sense, ability, ingenuity. To moderation are subordinated orderliness, decency, modesty and self-control (*enkrateia*). To courage are subordinated perseverance, assurance, high-mindedness, spiritual strength, and industriousness. To justice are subordinated piety, kindness, sociability and civility. (Stobaeus, *Eclog*, II, 7, 5b, p. 60, 15–24 = *SVF* III 264)<sup>19</sup>

Among the five subordinate virtues mentioned by Diogenes Laertius, two are (according to Stobaeus) subordinated to *andreia* (courage), i.e. *karteria* (endurance) and *megalopsuchia* (high-mindedness), two are subordinated to *phronêsis* (prudence), *euboulia* (good sense) and *agchinoia* (shrewdness), and one is subordinated to *sôphrosunê* (moderation), *enkrateia* (self-control). Thus, two features are striking in Diogenes Laertius' selection: no virtue subordinate to justice is mentioned, and, among the few minor vices he mentions, one can find two subordinate virtues which often form a pair, *karteria* and *enkrateia*. This is hardly a mere coincidence.

In any case, *enkrateia* is subordinated to *sôphrosunê* (moderation). As far as one can guess, this implies that *akrasia* must be subordinated to the corresponding vice, *akolasia* (intemperance).

Moderation, according to Diogenes Laertius and Stobaeus, is the 'science of what should be chosen and avoided and of things which are neither'. But there are two versions of this definition, and the wording of the two versions is not exactly the same. Diogenes Laertius uses the words *epistêmê hôn aireteon kai eulabêteon kai oudeterôn*, while Stobaeus speaks of *epistêmê hairetôn kai pheuktôn kai oudeterôn*, and Pseudo-Andronicus speaks of *epistêmê hairetôn kai ouch hairetôn kai oudeterôn*. The use of *eulabêteon* in the definition reported by Diogenes Laertius, is odd, since *eulabeia* (cautiousness) is one form of impulse among others. Precisely, according to Stobaeus, moderation 'deals with man's impulses',<sup>20</sup> and this apparently extends the scope of moderation more widely than if it were applying only to choice and cautiousness. Hence, one has to assume that the use of *eulabêteon* in the diogenian definition is non-technical. Another possibility is that it is one among the many corruptions of this passage.

<sup>19</sup> Τῶν δὲ ὑποτεταγμένων ταῖς ἀρεταῖς ταύταις τὰς μὲν τῇ φρονήσει ὑποτετάχθαι, τὰς δὲ τῇ σωφροσύνῃ, τὰς δὲ τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ, τὰς δὲ τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ. Τῇ μὲν οὖν φρονήσει ὑποτάττεσθαι εὐβουλίαν, εὐλογιστίαν, ἀγχινοίαν, νουνέχειαν, (εὐστοχίαν,) εὐμηχανίαν· τῇ δὲ σωφροσύνῃ εὐταξίαν, κοσμιότητα, αἰδημοσύνην, ἐγκράτειαν· τῇ δὲ ἀνδρείᾳ καρτερίαν, θαρραλεότητα, μεγαλοψυχίαν, εὐψυχίαν, φιλοπονίαν· τῇ δὲ δικαιοσύνῃ εὐσέβειαν, χρηστότητα, εὐκοινωνησίαν, εὐσυναλλαξίαν.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 13 (*SVF* III 264): περὶ τὰ ὁρμὰς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

In any case, Stobaeus' *pheuktôn*, 'things to avoid', is more neutral and thus is a more satisfactory reading.

On the other hand, Stobaeus' remark that moderation 'deals with man's impulses' is puzzling, since it seems to imply that only moderation should deal with impulse, and this does not seem to be the case. For, if it were, it would imply that other virtues have nothing to do with impulse. The very fact that Stobaeus says that 'prudence' deals with 'duties'<sup>21</sup> implies the contrary, since impulse controls action, and therefore should also deal with 'appropriate acts', which are certain types of actions. Moreover, *karteria* (endurance) is not a species of moderation, but of courage, for endurance implies resistance to physical pain, and hence seems to have something to do with impulse (since pain for the Stoics is a form of impulse). This, too, seems to imply that at least one form of courage, endurance, deals with impulse. A suitable solution would be that the two definitions are more or less complementary, so that moderation could be a science of what should be chosen or avoided among man's impulses. This would fit rather well with the definitions of the other virtues. However, it is clear that choice and avoidance and impulse have some connection between them, since choice is one kind of impulse: it is a species of will (*boulêsis*), a reasonable impulse resulting from reasoning,<sup>22</sup> so that a choice between impulses would be too restrictive or circular.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, at first sight, nothing explains why it is specifically moderation and its subordinate virtues that are said to deal with impulses, and why this is said of no other virtue, since some other virtues seem to deal with impulse as well. This requires further examination.

Impulse (*hormê*) is one of the faculties or powers (*dunameis*) of soul, alongside presentation and assent.<sup>24</sup> Some impulses control actions:

<sup>21</sup> The famous *kathekonta*, also translated by 'appropriate acts' or 'proper functions'. On which see Long-Sedley, chap. 59.

<sup>22</sup> Stob., *Eclog.*, II, 7, 9a., p. 87, 20–1 W. (*SVF* III 173).

<sup>23</sup> One of the meanings of the so-called Stoic 'indifferents' (as opposed to good or bad) is that two things are indifferent when none of them generates any impulse, though a choice must be made between the two of them (S.E., *M.*, XI, 60 = *SVF* III 122).

<sup>24</sup> On the question whether reason too is one of soul's faculties, see Tieleman (2003), 38, who argues that even the word 'power' may not have belonged to the vocabulary of ancient Stoics. Otherwise, presentation, assent and impulse are said to be 'alterations' (S.E., *M.*, VII, 237) or 'movements' (Plut., *Adv. Col.*, 26) of the soul. They are, in any case, what 'happens' in the governing part of the soul, the *hegemonikon* (D.L., VII, 159 = *SVF* II 837), or what this governing part 'produces' (Actius, *Plac.*, IV, 21 = *SVF* II 836).

‘impulse in man is reason giving him the order to act’.<sup>25</sup> They are called ‘practical impulses’ because they include a ‘moving element’.<sup>26</sup> Such an assertion implies that some other impulses are non-practical.<sup>27</sup> The more general description is that impulse is ‘a movement of the soul towards something’, or ‘a movement of the soul towards something concerning action’,<sup>28</sup> as opposed to repulsion, which is a movement of the soul rejecting something.

Some impulses are reasonable in the sense that they are submitted to reason: the Stoics call them *eupatheiai* (‘good feelings’ or ‘good emotions’). Some are unreasonable in the sense that they do not obey reason: the Stoics call them *pathê*, i.e. ‘passions’, ‘emotions’ or ‘affections’. With the exception of pain (since ‘present evil does not affect the wise man’, as reported by Cicero, *Tusc.*, IV, 14), each form of impulse or repulsion has an unreasonable form or ‘passion’ and a reasonable form or ‘good feeling’. And each kind of impulse has a practical form and a non-practical form: practical impulses are directed to future actions, whereas non-practical impulses are reactions to the presence of evil or good. Hence, there are four basic forms, each of them being reasonable or unreasonable: in principle, we should have eight fundamental forms, but in fact, we only have seven, because there is no reasonable impulse corresponding to pain.

To sum up, the three primary good feelings and the four primary passions may be laid out in the following table:<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Plut., *Stoic. Repugn.*, 11, 1037 F (*SVF* III 175), Cherniss transl.

<sup>26</sup> Stob., *Eclog.*, II, 7, 9a., p. 88, 1 ff. (*SVF* III 171).

<sup>27</sup> Ancient testimonies do not explain what non-practical impulses are. However, since non-practical impulse should not contain a moving element, it is rather easy to guess that it does not lead to action. Hence, it is likely that joy, pleasure and pain are non-practical impulses: these impulses do not give us the order to act, since their object is already present (we ‘enjoy’ it, we do not act in order to get it). See Gourinat (1996), 87. The point at issue is nevertheless complicated by the fact that we may have *practical impulses* towards objects which may give us pleasure and pain, or joy. However, there must be no confusion between a practical impulse to get or avoid something which, once obtained, provokes in us the non-practical impulse of pleasure or pain. Of course, current translations of the Greek *hormê* by ‘impulse’ (or *impulsion* in French) introduce a good deal of ambiguity, since ‘impulse’ rather connotes a Stoic ‘practical impulse’ (impulse being an ‘incitement or stimulus to action arising from some state of mind or feeling’, according to the *English Oxford Dictionary*). However there is, to the best of my knowledge, no satisfactory translation. The French *tendance*, often used, is also clearly too weak.

<sup>28</sup> Stobaeus, *Eclog.*, II, p. 86, 19–20 (*SVF* III 169).

<sup>29</sup> This table reproduces with some improvements the corresponding table in Gourinat (1996), 89. See Tieleman (2003), 114. For the detail of the various passions and ‘good feelings’, see Gourinat (1996), 87–90.

<b>rational impulses (<i>hormai logikai</i>)</b>				
	<b>non-practical impulse</b> (impulse concerning objects already at hand <i>in the present</i> )		<b>practical impulse</b> (impulse to perform an action <i>in the future</i> )	
	<b>impulse towards an apparent good:</b> soul's relaxation ( <i>eparsis</i> )	<b>repulsion from an apparent evil: soul's contraction</b> ( <i>sustolē</i> )	<b>impulse towards an apparent good: soul's inclination</b> ( <i>orexis</i> )	<b>repulsion from an apparent evil:</b> soul's backward ( <i>ekklisis</i> )
<b>reasonable impulses</b> ("good feelings" = <i>eupatheia</i> )	joy ( <i>chara</i> )		will ( <i>boulēsis</i> , lat. <i>voluntas</i> )	cautiousness ( <i>eulabeia</i> )
<b>reasonable impulses</b> (passions = <i>pathē</i> )	pleasure ( <i>hēdonē</i> )	pain ( <i>lupē</i> )	desire ( <i>epithumia</i> )	fear ( <i>phobos</i> )

Hence, if the basic feature concerning moderation (*sôphrosunē*) is that it concerns human impulse, one could think that it ought to deal with all kinds of impulses. In a strict sense, this could explain that the *genus* of *enkrateia*, moderation, deals with man's impulses, according to Stobaeus, while endurance is subordinated to another virtue. Because courage, the genus of endurance, deals with *repulsion* rather than with impulse in the strict sense. This is coherent with Stobaeus' remark that courage deals with 'things to bear'.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it makes some sense that *phronēsis* deals with duties and justice with 'distribution'.<sup>31</sup> Despite the fact that duties must be performed,<sup>32</sup> and that impulse controls actions, it seems rather clear that not all impulses deal with actions, and hence not all impulses deal with duties. It is also clear that many actions are not duties and that, nevertheless, all impulses concerning actions must be dealt with, even impulses which determine or 'order' actions which are not duties.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Stob., *Eclog.*, II, 7, 5b2, p. 60, 14 (*SVF* III 264): τὴν δὲ ἀνδρείαν περὶ τὰς ὑπομονάς.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 12–5 (*SVF* III 264): τὴν μὲν φρόνησιν περὶ τὰ καθήκοντα γίνεσθαι [...] τὴν δὲ δικαιοσύνην περὶ τὰς ἀπονεμήσεις.

<sup>32</sup> Stoic definitions of duty include the fact that they are performed (*πραχθέν*): "Proper function is so defined: 'consequentiality in life, something which, once it has been done, has a reasonable justification'" (Stobaeus, II, p. 85, 14–5 = *SVF* III 494 = Long & Sedley, 59 B, their translation).

<sup>33</sup> Some actions are contrary to duty, and many actions are 'neither duties nor contrary to duties'.

This is why it makes good sense that two different kinds of virtues may deal with impulses on one hand and duties on the other hand: impulses and duties have some actions in common, but not all actions are duties, and not all impulses deal with actions. More clearly, distribution does not necessarily have something to do with action, duty or impulse, and therefore, justice need not being associated with impulse.

As a result of the previous considerations, the object of moderation (*sôphrosunê*) appears to be man's impulses in opposition to courage, which itself deals with repulsions. More specifically, the object of moderation appears to be man's impulses in all actions which are not concerned with duty, or at least, in the aspect of action which has nothing to do with the question whether such and such action is a duty. The object of moderation also appears to be man's impulses when no duty is at stake, primarily for impulses governing pleasures and desires. The first feature is for instance clear in the definition of orderliness as 'a science of when something must be done, and what must be done after which action, and, in general, the order of actions'.<sup>34</sup> This clearly does not exclude that such and such action *in* the process (and also the action which must result *from* the succession of actions performed) may be a duty, but this is clearly not the issue. The object of this particular virtue is to know what to do and when to do it, in order to achieve a certain result. Hence, it is clear that it has nothing to do with the morality or 'obligation' of the action, but only with rules of efficiency. So the impulse here must be controlled not from the point of view of duty or 'appropriateness', but from the point of view of efficiency. This is the particular object of the virtue of orderliness, while impulse in general is the object of moderation in general.

If impulse in the proper sense (as opposed to repulsion) and as such (as opposed to whether an action resulting from impulse is a duty or not) is the object of moderation, it is also the object of the opposite vice, intemperance. Therefore, some particular impulses may be supposed to be the objects of self-control (*enkrateia*) and incontinence (*akrasia*) as subordinated respectively to moderation and intemperance. What impulses are their specific objects is what we may now try to determine.

<sup>34</sup> Stobaeus, II, 7, 5b2, p. 61, 7–9 (*SVF* III 264): εὐταξίαν δὲ ἐπιστήμην τοῦ πότε πρακτέον, καὶ τί μετὰ τί, καὶ καθόλου τῆς τάξεως τῶν πράξεων.



## b. Akrasia, enkrateia and pleasure

Diogenes Laertius and Stobaeus provide two different definitions of *enkrateia*. No definition of *akrasia* is reported. Diogenes Laertius' definition is twofold:

Self-control is a disposition not to go beyond (*anuperbaton*) what is <manifestly> in conformity with right reason, or an enduring capacity which cannot be defeated <by> pleasures. (VII, 93)<sup>35</sup>

In contrast with this twofold definition, the one reported by Stobaeus is simple:

Self-control is an indomitable (*anuperblêton*) science of what is manifestly in conformity with right reason. (II, 7, 5b2, p. 61, 11–12)<sup>36</sup>

Diogenes' first definition is close to Stobaeus' definition, but there are differences. Marcovich has added 'manifestly' (*phanentôn*) in Diogenes' text, by analogy to Stobaeus' text. This may be a superfluous addition, considering that the two definitions are different on another point: Diogenes speaks of 'disposition' (*diathesis*), while Stobaeus speaks of 'science' (*epistêmê*). But Diogenes' version, as conjectured by Marcovich, may be found literally in Clemens of Alexandria.<sup>37</sup> Another variant may be found in Sextus, where 'manifestly' (*phanentôn*) is replaced by 'really' ('what is' or 'becomes': *gignomenôn*).<sup>38</sup> Diogenes' second definition is also reported by Ps.-Andronicos.<sup>39</sup>

In any case, Diogenes' first definition (which is also Stobaeus' sole definition) is at first sight far from clear. What does *anuperbatos* mean? What does the reference to 'right reason' (*orthos logos*) mean?

The word *anuperbatos* does not seem to appear anywhere else in Stoic fragments. It could have either a passive or an active meaning.

If it has a passive meaning, it means 'indomitable'. In this sense, it has the support of Stobaeus' version, *anuperblêton*, which has a passive meaning. It means apparently that self-control is a disposition or a science nobody and nothing could overcome: no one or no thing could modify

<sup>35</sup> Τὴν δ' ἐγκράτειαν διάθεσιν ἀνυπέρβατον τῶν κατ' ὀρθὸν λόγον <φανέντων> ἢ ἔξιν αἰτήτητον <ὕφ> ἡδονῶν. (Marcovich's text: *SVF* III 265 gives the text of the manuscripts, to which Marcovich has added the words between square brackets < >).

<sup>36</sup> Ἐγκράτειαν δὲ ἐπιστήμην ἀνυπέρβλητον τῶν κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον φανέντων. Note that ἀνυπέρβλητον is the text of the manuscripts. Wachsmuth's emendation (by analogy with Diogenes Laertius) is ἀνυπέρβατον.

<sup>37</sup> Clem. Al., *Strom.*, II, 18, 470 P., 155 Stählin-Früchtel (*SVF* III 275).

<sup>38</sup> S.E., *M.*, IX, 153 (*SVF* III 274): Ἐγκράτεια γὰρ ἐστὶ διάθεσις ἀνυπέρβατος τῶν κατ' ὀρθὸν λόγον γιγνομένων.

<sup>39</sup> Ps.-Andronicos, *De passionibus*, 23, 17 (*SVF* III 272).

this disposition, or subdue it, or dominate it. However, the precision may seem somehow odd. For, according to the Stoics, every virtue is ‘consistent with itself, firm, and immutable by reason’<sup>40</sup> and every science is a ‘strongly established comprehension, immutable by reason’.<sup>41</sup> So, if self-control is a virtue, it is immutable by definition and hence it is indomitable. It may be assumed that the difference lies within the fact that virtue or science in general is ‘immutable by reason’ (or, as one may also understand, by reasoning), though the fact that self-control is indomitable is more general: it is not only by reason and as an theoretical disposition that this virtue is indomitable, it is as a psychic disposition which nothing can dominate, not only reason or reasoning. And this presumably alludes to the objects of self-control, pleasures. Thus, it could mean that self-control is a disposition that no pleasure could take control of, that no pleasure could dominate or overwhelm. This would allude to the Stoic tenet that there is no irrational part of the soul, and that an unreasonable impulse like pleasure cannot ‘control’ the virtue of self-control. In that case, we have to assume that the two definitions are more or less two parts of the same definition, and that they are complementary. However, it is only in Stobaeus’ version that this could make some sense. For, in Diogenes’ version, neither the word *diathesis* nor *anuperbatos* seems to be construable with the expression ‘things in conformity with right reason’ in the genitive. For, in its passive meaning, *anuperbatos* requires ὑπό plus the genitive, while the word *diathesis* requires πρὸς plus the accusative. As a consequence, *tôn kat’ orthon logon* is the complement of nothing. Only in Stobaeus’ version does the passive meaning seem plausible, since *epistêmê* requires the genitive. However, this is why *anuperbaton* may be replaced by *anuperblêton*. Thus, presumably, *anuperblêton* is a scribe’s emendation or *lapsus* to fit an interpretation of *anuperbatos*.

Consequently, the active meaning is more plausible. If the word *anuperbatos* has an active meaning, it means that *enkrateia* is unable to transgress what is in conformity with right reason. A more literal sense may even be given to *anuperbatos*, that of ‘not going beyond’, since passion

<sup>40</sup> Plut., *Virt. moral.*, 3, 441 C (*SVF* I 202): Ὁμολογούμενον καὶ βέβαιον καὶ ἀμετάπτωτον ὑπὸ λόγου (despite the fact that this testimony has been classified by Arnim among Zeno’s fragments, this definition of virtue is considered by Plutarch as common to all the Stoics).

<sup>41</sup> Stobaeus, *Eclog.*, II, 7, 51, p. 73, 20–1 (*SVF* III 112): Κατάληψιν ἀσφαλῆ καὶ ἀμετάπτωτον ὑπὸ λόγου.

(*pathos*) consists in the ‘overflowing’ (*pleonazein*) of impulse.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, *anuperbatos* seems to mean that self-control is a disposition to never go beyond the limits of right reason.

However, reference to ‘right reason’ is unclear in this context. ‘Right reason’ is one of the names the Stoics give to virtue.<sup>43</sup> Generally speaking, the notion of ‘right reason’ seems, for the Stoics, to refer to the idea that there is a normal or correct state of the development of reason, which is a set of notions corresponding to the way things are.<sup>44</sup> This correct form of reason is normative, as far as moral concepts are concerned. In the case of *enkrateia*, the reference to a conformity with right reason seems a little too vague: after all, any virtue is by definition in conformity with right reason, in the sense that virtue is right reason, since virtue consists in a certain disposition of man’s soul. Again, the reference to right reason may presumably be clearer if the two definitions complete one another. In that case, conformity with right reason refers to the capacity of not being dominated by pleasure, and not transgressing right reason by yielding to pleasure. A text of Stoic inspiration by Clemens of Alexandria develops the relation of self-control to ‘right reason’:

Anyone who has one virtue in the manner of a Gnostic, has all virtues because of their mutual implication. Since self-control is a disposition not to go beyond what is manifestly in conformity with right reason, someone who will control himself is someone who will keep all his impulses in conformity with right reason, or someone who will master himself in such a way that he will have no impulse contrary to right reason. (*Strom.*, II, 18, 470 P., 155, 3–7 Stählin-Früchtel = *SVF* III 275)<sup>45</sup>

The doctrine of mutual implication of virtues clearly is a reference to a piece of Stoic doctrine. This is why the whole passage may be assumed to be of Stoic origin. In conformity with Stobaeus’ general affirmation that the virtue to which self-control is subordinated, moderation, ‘deals with man’s impulses’, Clemens’ exposition of self-control explicitly refers

<sup>42</sup> D.L., VII, 110 (*SVF* I 205); Gal., *Plac. Hipp. Plat.*, IV, 2, 8, p. 240, 12–3 De Lacy (*SVF* III 462).

<sup>43</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.*, IV, 34. ‘Search for right reason’ is Chrysippus’ definition of philosophy (Isid. Pelus., *Epist.*, V, 558 P. G. = *FDS* 2B).

<sup>44</sup> See Frede (1993).

<sup>45</sup> Ὁ μίαν ἔχων ἀρετὴν γνωστικῶς πάσας ἔχει διὰ τὴν ἀντακολουθίαν. αὐτίκα ἢ ἐγκράτεια διάθεσις ἐστὶν ἀνυπέρβατος τῶν κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον φανέντων· ἐγκρατεύεται δὲ ὁ κατέχων τὰς παρὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον ὁρμὰς ἢ ὁ κατέχων αὐτὸν ὥστε μὴ ὁρμᾶν παρὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον.

to impulses. Keeping one's reason in conformity with right reason seems to be the same as keeping one's impulses in conformity with right reason. Thus, Clemens seems to imply that self-control consists of keeping all impulses in conformity with right reason. This clearly means that self-control consists of avoiding unreasonable impulses, i.e. passions.<sup>46</sup> In other words, someone who controls himself is someone who is not subject to passion, and has only 'good feelings'.

However, this seems to be too wide a definition. For it is clear that if moderation 'deals with man's impulses', moderation in general, and not only self-control in particular has the task of avoiding passions.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a way to solve the difficulty. For, even if it is true that moderation deals with man's impulses in general, it is also true that its species, with the exception of self-control, do not have the function of keeping impulses in conformity with right reason, because they have nothing to do with the avoidance of passion. As mentioned above, the definition of orderliness as 'a science of when something must be done, and what must be done after which action, and, in general, the order of actions'<sup>47</sup> has nothing to do with the avoidance of passion, but only with a certain rational order of efficiency in the accomplishment of a set of actions. Similarly, decency (*kosmiotês*), as a 'science of suitable and unsuitable movements', and modesty (*aidêmosunê*), as a 'science of avoiding correct reproach', which are the other species of moderation mentioned in Stobaeus,<sup>48</sup> do not have the strict moral connotation of self-control, and do not have the function of avoiding passions and keeping our impulses in conformity with right reason. Therefore, it makes sense to use this definition only for self-control.

On the other hand, the definition of self-control as keeping impulses in conformity with right reason really seems to be too wide for self-control. For the second definition of self-control (or the second part of the definition) in Diogenes Laertius clearly restricts self-control to pleasure, i.e. to one kind of impulse, and does not extend it to all impulses. Moreover, extending self-control to all kinds of impulses would make self-control a genre, not a species. Obviously, one could partly solve the difficulty by admitting that self-control is the virtue that keeps all the impulses in accordance with virtue (right reason), extending its scope above the question of passions. Nonetheless, once again, this would

<sup>46</sup> Stobaeus, *Eclog*, II, p. 89, 4 ff. (*SVF* III 389, Long-Sedley 65 A) clearly says that passion is 'unreasonable' in the sense that it is 'contrary to right and natural reason'.

<sup>47</sup> Stob., II, 7, 5b2, p. 61, 7–9 (*SVF* III 264).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 61, 9–11 (*SVF* III 264).

mean that this part of the definition has no connection with the part which links it with pleasure. It would mean that there are two distinct kinds of incontinence.

Thus, again, it would make better sense to assume that the definition in Diogenes Laertius is composed of two parts, complementary to each other; and that self-control is specifically concerned with pleasure. Since moderation is the ‘science of what should be chosen and avoided and of things which are neither’, self-control would be a specific science concerning things that may cause pleasure. More exactly, it seems to be a science or a disposition to resist things that may cause pleasure, hence not a disposition to *choose between* pleasures, but a disposition to *abstain from* pleasure. Otherwise, if the two definitions in Diogenes are not complementary, they are somehow incompatible, since the first one makes *enkrateia* a disposition to avoid *any* passion, while the second makes it a disposition to abstain from only *one kind* of passion, namely pleasure.

Above all, despite its Stoic origin, the text by Clemens is *not* a reliable piece of Stoic doctrine. Clemens explicitly describes Gnostic virtues, not Stoic ones, though Arnim carefully excised the adverb *gnōstikōs* from his fr. 275, so that it may more easily appear to be a Stoic fragment, which it is not. It is a text that apparently explores a possibility left open by the first part of Diogenes’ definition, but there is no certainty that this possibility was explored by the Stoics themselves.

That *enkrateia* deals primarily with pleasure seems to be confirmed by a text of Sextus Empiricus, which describes *enkrateia* as self-control regarding sexual pleasure, as opposed to *karteria* as the endurance of things causing bodily pain:

(153) For self-control is ‘a disposition not to go beyond what is in conformity with right reason’ or ‘a virtue which makes us superior to the things which seem hard to abstain from’. For a man, they say, is continent not when he abstains from an old woman with one foot in the grave, but when he has the power to enjoy Laïs or Phryne or some such charmer and then abstains. (154) And endurance is ‘the science of things bearable and not bearable’, or ‘a virtue which makes us superior to the things which seem hard to bear’. For it is the man who holds firm when he is being cut and burned that shows endurance, and not the man who is drinking sweet wine. (*Against Math.*, IX, 153–154 [partly in *SVF* III 274], Bury’s translation with substantial modifications)<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> (153) Ἐγκράτεια γάρ ἐστι διάθεσις ἀνυπέρβατος τῶν κατ’ ὀρθὸν λόγον γιγνομένων, ἢ ἀρετὴ ὑπεράνω ποιούσα ἡμᾶς τῶν δοκούντων εἶναι δυσασπασχέτων· ἐγκρατεύεται γάρ, φασίν, οὐχ ὁ θανατιώσης γραδὸς ἀπεχόμενος, ἀλλ’ ὁ Λαΐδος καὶ Φρύνης ἢ τινος τοιαύτης δυνάμενος ἀπολαύσαι, εἴτα ἀπεχόμενος. (154) Καρτερία δέ ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη

The second part of the definition of self-control reported by Sextus may be argued to be of his own invention.<sup>50</sup> It also may be argued on the basis of a parallel passage by Plutarch that, contrary to what Sextus maintains, abstinence from ugly old women was considered by Chrysippus to be a case of self-control (it is abstinence from sexual pleasure), but not as remarkable and praiseworthy.<sup>51</sup> However, we shall examine that later. Whatever may be the case, the example clearly shows that self-control relates to sexual pleasures, as opposed to endurance as resistance to pain. Thus, self-control and endurance are two kinds of subordinate virtues corresponding to two main forms of impulse. This is the reason why, probably, self-control and endurance are coupled together: self-control is a virtue relating to pleasure, while endurance is a virtue relating to pain, and both are respectively impulse and repulsion relating to apparent present good.

Thus, it seems rather clear that *enkrateia* consists of a capacity to abstain from pleasure, predominantly sexual pleasure, but presumably also pleasures linked to food and drink, as was traditional.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, *akrasia* is a vice consisting of both an incapacity to resist the attractions of pleasures, and a systematic tendency to yield to pleasure. This seems to be confirmed by a text in Epictetus, which, interestingly enough, links *akrasia* with sexual pleasure.<sup>53</sup> However, the fact that self-control is not a capacity to choose between pleasures, but to abstain from pleasure, seems to make sense of the definition of self-control as reported in Stobaeus: self-control is an ‘indomitable’ science *concerning* what is manifestly in conformity with right reason, and this science gives the capacity to not be ‘defeated *by* pleasures’ and hence to abstain *from* them. On the other hand, Diogenes’ version makes sense in a different way: if the two definitions are to be understood as completing each other, self-control is a disposition not to go beyond what is manifestly in agreement with right reason, and this disposition enables us not to

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ὑπομενετέων καὶ οὐχ ὑπομενετέων, ἡ ἀρετὴ ὑπέρανω ποιοῦσα ἡμᾶς τῶν δοκούντων εἶναι δυσυπομενήτων· χρῆται γὰρ καρτερίᾳ ὁ τεμνόμενος καὶ καιόμενος, εἶτα [δὲ] διακαρτερῶν, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὁ οἰνόμελι πίνων.

<sup>50</sup> This is argued by Algra (1990), 457, n. 37.

<sup>51</sup> This is what may be inferred from a comparison with an excerpt from Chrysippus’ *On Zeus* quoted by Plutarch, *Stoic. Repugn.*, 13, 1039 A, as is also argued by Algra (1990), 457–8. More on this below, the text being quoted and commented then.

<sup>52</sup> On the traditional objects of *akrasia*, see e.g. Dorion (2003), 646.

<sup>53</sup> Epict., *Diss.*, II, 18, 6: ‘When you have yielded to someone in carnal intercourse, do not count merely this one defeat, but count also the fact that you have fed your incontinence (*akrasia*), you have given it additional strength’ (Oldfather translation).

be 'defeated by pleasures' and hence to abstain *from* them. Stobaeus' version, insofar as it describes self-control as a science, is consonant with the Stoic intellectualist conception of virtue. Diogenes' version could be endorsed even without any intellectualist connotation.

Whatever the case may be, it seems evident that *akrasia* and *enkrateia*, incontinence and self-control have the same traditional objects for the Stoics as they usually had in the Socratic and Aristotelian tradition: they deal with pleasures, especially sexual pleasure and, presumably, pleasures concerning food and drink. However, the conception of the very nature of this disposition to yield to pleasure (incontinence) or to abstain from it (self-control) was very different from what it was in the classical tradition. Incontinence and self-control were, for the Stoics, a vice and a virtue, identified, according to the Stoic 'intellectualist' tradition,<sup>54</sup> with ignorance and science. Since virtue is a science and vice a form of ignorance, self-control, being a virtue, is also a science, and incontinence, being a vice, is a kind of ignorance. It is, in that respect, very far from the irrational power of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition. It is also very far from the Aristotelian tradition insofar as incontinence appears as a subordinate vice, while it plays a central part in Aristotle. However, although self-control and incontinence appear to have a subordinate rank in the hierarchy of virtues and vices, they ought to be considered as playing an important part, because they control man's relation to pleasure. It is not because of them that man occasionally yields to pleasure or abstains from it, but it is thanks to them that he has a systematic and consistent disposition to abstain from pleasure or to yield to it.

Moreover, the subordinate rank of self-control and incontinence in standard Stoicism does not seem to be applicable to self-control in Cleanthes, nor to incontinence itself in Chrysippus' conception of passion. This is what requires further examination.

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<sup>54</sup> There is, presumably, a good deal of exaggeration about Stoic 'intellectualism'. The Stoic doctrine of passion is not intellectualist, since it assumes that (1) passion may remain even when reason has restored the right judgment and that (2) there is a first movement or *propathēia*, which precedes assent and is uncontrollable, on which see Gourinat (1996), 82–3, 98–100 and Graver (1999). But the Stoics are intellectualists in the sense that they assume virtue to be a science, and vice to be ignorance.

## 2. *Cleanthes and Chrysippus*

In addition to the standard Stoic doctrine one may find in doxographic sources like Stobaeus and Diogenes Laertius, there are some more precise accounts of some relevant points in texts by opponents to Stoicism. These texts give us literal quotations from two major Stoic thinkers, Cleanthes and Chrysippus. The doctrine on *enkrateia* and *akrasia* in those texts seems a bit different from the one exposed in standard Stoic texts.

### a. *Enkrateia as a cardinal virtue in Cleanthes*

According to Plutarch, self-control was one of the four cardinal virtues acknowledged by Cleanthes. Thus, in Cleanthes, self-control took the place traditionally assigned to prudence (*phronêsis*):

And Cleanthes in his treatises on Physics, having said that tension is a stroke of fire, and that, if it becomes adequate in the soul to achieve what is fitting, it is called strength and power, adds literally the following words: ‘This strength and power, when it arises in the case of things manifestly to be adhered to, is self-control; when in the case of things to be withstood, courage; concerning values, justice; concerning choices and avoidances, moderation’. (*Stoic. Repugn.*, 7, 1034 D–E = *SVF* I 563 = Long-Sedley 61 C; translation based on Long-Sedley and Cherniss)<sup>55</sup>

This seems to be a rather trustworthy testimony, since Plutarch says that he reports Cleanthes’ words literally (*kata lexin*). It could be added that Plutarch seems to provide us with the title of the treatise from which the quotation is excerpted, a book called the *Physical Treatises*, as is often assumed in editions and translations of this text. But this is unlikely, since the plural and the absence of any article in the Greek seem rather to imply a reference to ‘some physical treatises’.<sup>56</sup> Of course, if this was a precise reference to a treatise, it would imply that the writer who quoted this passage, either Plutarch or his source, had access to a copy

<sup>55</sup> ‘Ο δὲ Κλεάνθης ἐν ὑπομνήμασι φυσικοῖς εἰπὼν ὅτι ‘πληγὴ πυρὸς ὁ τόνος ἐστί, καὶ ἰκανὸς ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γένηται πρὸς τὸ ἐπιτελεῖν τὰ ἐπιβάλλοντα, ἰσχὺς καλεῖται καὶ κράτος’ ἐπιφέρει κατὰ λέξιν ‘ἢ δ’ ἰσχὺς αὕτη καὶ τὸ κράτος, ὅταν μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς φανεῖσιν ἐμμενετέοις ἐγγένηται, ἐγκράτειά ἐστιν, ὅταν δ’ ἐπὶ τοῖς ὑπομενετέοις, ἀνδρεία· περὶ τὰς ἀξίας δὲ δικαιοσύνη· περὶ δὲ τὰς αἰρέσεις καὶ ἐκκλίσεις σωφροσύνη.’

<sup>56</sup> This was suggested to me by Thomas Bénatouil, following a suggestion by Marwan Rashed.



of Cleanthes' book.<sup>57</sup> This could be further evidence of the reliability of the excerpt. Nonetheless, even if we have to content ourselves with the fact that the quotation is said to be literal, this seems to be sufficient proof that Plutarch or his source had access to a reliable text.

According to the excerpt, Cleanthes appears to have modified the list of the four cardinal virtues inherited by Zeno from the tradition,<sup>58</sup> and replaced prudence (*phronêsis*) by self-control (*enkrateia*). This may appear as a surprising move, but this move must be interpreted in the context of the excerpt. First, this excerpt comes from a book whose subject matter is physics, not ethics. Second, Cleanthes defines virtue neither as science (as Chrysippus will) nor as 'disposition originated under the influence of reason' (as Zeno did),<sup>59</sup> but as 'strength and power'. Furthermore, this 'strength and power' is the name given to a sufficient *tonos* of the soul. This *tonos* or tension is, in turn, defined as a 'stroke of fire'. All these elements point to what may be called a 'physical dimension of virtue'.<sup>60</sup> It is striking that Cleanthes makes no reference to knowledge, or to science. His description, in being exclusively physical, is rather at odds with the Stoic tradition. For although Stoic tradition makes soul a body and makes properties and movements of the soul bodily properties and movements, Stoic tradition also insists on the cognitive aspect of virtue. This aspect seems to be absent from Cleanthes' description.

<sup>57</sup> Treatises by the first three scholars, Zeno, Cleanthes and mainly Chrysippus, may be assumed to be still at hand by the time of Plutarch. There can be no doubt that Plutarch, like Galen, had access to copies of Chrysippus' treatises. There can be some doubt about Zeno and Cleanthes, since Galen, *Plac. Hipp. Plat.*, V, 6, 40 says he was unable to find a copy of Zeno's *On Affections*. However, Epictetus, *Diss.*, I, 20, 14 and IV, 9, 6 attests that Zeno was still read during the 2nd century A.D. and, according to Themistius, *Orat.*, IV, 13, 60B, new copies of works by Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus were made by copyists in the imperial library at Constantinople in 356–357 A.D. This is the last testimony of the existence of Cleanthes' books, which, around 538, according to Simplicius, *In Arist. Cat.*, 334, 1–3, had long disappeared with all the works of the founders of the school. Thus, there is some plausibility that copies of Cleanthes' treatises were still available to Plutarch, in the mid 2nd century A.D. Nevertheless, even if Plutarch himself had not seen Cleanthes' treatises on physics, he may have had access to a source where the extract was carefully copied from the original.

<sup>58</sup> Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.*, 7, 1034 C (*SVF* I 200); id., *Virt. Mor.*, 2, 441 A (*SVF* I 201). In the first of these two passages, Plutarch explicitly acknowledges that Zeno had borrowed the list of the four cardinal virtues from Plato, but, in fact it is only in Plato's *Laws*, XII, 964b that one can find the complete 'traditional' platonic list. Plato's *Republic* has more hesitation, since when justice is included in the list (IV, 441c–442c), wisdom (*sophia*) takes the place of prudence.

<sup>59</sup> Plutarch, *Virt. Mor.*, 3, 441 C (*SVF* I 202).

<sup>60</sup> On which see Bénatouil (2005).

Moreover, standard Stoicism (presumably Chrysippean),<sup>61</sup> as reported by Stobaeus, emphasizes a difference between the cardinal virtues defined as sciences and some other complementary virtues, which *are not* sciences but only ‘capacities produced through exercise’ (*dunameis ek tēi askēseōs perigignomenai*). Among those virtues, Stobaeus lists ‘wealth of soul’ and ‘strength of soul’.<sup>62</sup> He describes ‘strength of soul’ as ‘a sufficient tension in judging and acting and in not doing so’,<sup>63</sup> and he compares it to bodily strength. Arnim includes this passage among the fragments of Cleanthes as fr. 563. Since the above quoted text by Plutarch and the passage by Stobaeus both include the definition of ‘strength of soul’ as a ‘sufficient tension’ (*tonos ikanos*), Arnim’s inclusion has some plausibility. However, to accept this text as a fragment of Cleanthes has some awkward consequences, given that Stobaeus contrasts the cardinal virtues defined in standard Stoicism as knowledges with non-intellectual virtues resulting from exercise (health and strength of soul). Consequently, we would have to accept the idea that cardinal virtues according to Cleanthes have no theoretical aspect or intellectual content. However, this certainly is a wrong inference, since Cleanthes acknowledges that virtue is teachable.<sup>64</sup> If he considers virtue as teachable, this precisely means that, according to him, virtue is not only physical strength.

Therefore, it is likely that standard Stoicism accepted Cleanthes’ ‘strength of soul’ but refused to consider it as the basis of the four cardinal virtues. On the contrary, ‘strength of soul’ and health of soul (among others) were contrasted with the more intellectual virtues which were defined as sciences. In other words, the four cardinal virtues, being sciences, are possessed when we know their objects, while virtues like strength of soul are acquired through psychic exercise.

From that point of view, it is clear that Cleanthes, more than any other Stoic, insists on the physical aspect of virtue, a dimension which was presumably less emphasized by Chrysippus and the following tradition onwards. All the vocabulary used by Cleanthes in the passage quoted by Plutarch is strictly physical. One could call this a psychosomatic

<sup>61</sup> But note that a similar doctrine is attributed to Hecaton of Rhodes by D.L., VII, 90–91, on which see Tieleman (2003), 233–237.

<sup>62</sup> Stobaeus, *Eclog*, II, 7, 5b4, p. 62, 19–20 W. (*SVF* III 278): τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν ἰσχύν.

<sup>63</sup> Stobaeus, *Eclog*, II, 7, 5b4, p. 62, 25–63, 1 (*SVF* III 278): ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς ἰσχὺς τόπος ἐστὶν ἱκανὸς ἐν τῷ κρίνειν καὶ πράττειν ἢ μὴ (Inwood-Gerson translation).

<sup>64</sup> D.L., VII, 91 (*SVF* I 567).

description of virtue, or even a physical description of a psychological strength. It reminds us of what Aristotle says about the possibility of a twofold description of passion, in physical and psychical terms.<sup>65</sup> However, Aristotle does not apply the possibility of such a dual account to virtue, but only to passion. The originality of the Stoics, and especially of Cleanthes, lies in extending such a possibility to virtue as psychological strength. The replacement of prudence with self-control appears to be a facet of his insistence on the physical dimension of virtue.

Another point, emphasized by Hirzel and Pearson,<sup>66</sup> is that the replacement of prudence with self-control was Cleanthes' solution to an inconsistency in Zeno's classification of the cardinal virtues. Zeno, as Pearson writes,<sup>67</sup> 'held, or appeared to hold, that *phronêsis* is found in a double sense, (1) as the essential groundwork of all virtue, and (2) as the first in its four main divisions'. This means that prudence would have a generic meaning and a specific sense. As a matter of fact, Zeno seems to have defined each of the cardinal virtues as a form of prudence (*phronêsis*). For instance, he defines justice (*dikaïosunê*) as 'prudence in distributions' (*phronêsis en aponemêteois*).<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, he seems to have retained prudence as one of the four cardinal virtues, though, unfortunately, his definition of prudence, if there ever was one, seems to have been lost in a lacuna of the text of Plutarch reporting the cardinal virtues.<sup>69</sup> Hence, prudence, for Zeno, seems to have been both one of the four cardinal virtues and the form or the source of the three other ones.

However, this may have been done in two different ways. The common hypothesis is that Zeno took prudence in two meanings, a generic meaning and a specific sense: the word 'prudence' was both the name of a generic virtue and the name of a specific one. This is plausible, since it is something Stoics are known to have done. Another solution would be that prudence is the source of the three other virtues. In the parallel text by Plutarch, *Virt. Mor.*, 3, 441 C (*SVF* I 201), prudence is mentioned only in the definition of the three other virtues. These three other virtues are no more than prudence applied to different objects, and

<sup>65</sup> Ar., *De an.*, I, 1, 403a29 ff., on which see the classical paper by Aubenque (1957).

<sup>66</sup> Hirzel (1877–83), II, 97 ff.; Pearson (1891), 301–2.

<sup>67</sup> Pearson (1891), 302.

<sup>68</sup> Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.*, 7, 1034 C (*SVF* I 200). See Cherniss (1976), 424–5 and Long-Sedley, 61 C for the emended texts and translations.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

the object of each virtue appears to be what constitutes its specificity: if prudence applies to distribution, it is justice; if it applies to choices, it is moderation; and if it applies to things to bear, it is courage.<sup>70</sup> Hence, Zeno's position could be that he had considered prudence only as the source or the common character of the three other virtues, and not as a specific virtue alongside the three others. This would mean that, among the four cardinal virtues, prudence would be the source of the three others. Thus, prudence and the three other virtues would not be on the same level. Zeno's doctrine, on this point, would in fact emphasize the intellectualist aspect of his philosophy. For, instead of opposing practical and theoretical virtues, he may be assumed to have made a theoretical virtue, prudence,<sup>71</sup> the basis of three practical virtues.

Whatever may be the case, it is clear that prudence and the three other virtues were not on the same level. This seems to have been a plausible motivation for Cleanthes' introduction of self-control as one of the cardinal virtues: Zeno's 'inconsistency is therefore removed by retaining *phronêsis* in the wider, but substituting *enkrateia* in the narrower meaning'.<sup>72</sup>

Now, Pearson is certainly right in assuming that prudence's ambiguous position in Zeno's doctrine was Cleanthes' motivation for introducing self-control. Nonetheless, there is no evidence, contrary to what Pearson maintains, that prudence was Cleanthes' source-virtue; prudence simply does not appear in Cleanthes' classification. Pearson's hypothesis is that 'Zeno's *phronêsis* is explained as *ikanos tonos psuchês*, i.e. *ischus kai kratos*'.<sup>73</sup> No doubt this is a plausible hypothesis, but that is all. One might equally assume that Cleanthes has deleted prudence from the list of cardinal virtues, replaced it as *tonos* as the source of all virtues, and made prudence itself a purely subordinate virtue.<sup>74</sup> Cleanthes could have replaced prudence as the source of all virtue with 'strength and power' or tension (instead of explaining prudence as strength). Meanwhile, he replaced prudence as a cardinal virtue with self-control (if prudence as

<sup>70</sup> Plutarch, *Virt. Mor.*, 3, 441 A (*SVF* I 201): Ὅριζόμενος τὴν φρόνησιν ἐν μὲν ἀπονεμητέοις δικαιοσύνην, ἐν δ' αἰρετέοις σωφροσύνην, ἐν δ' ὑπομενετέοις ἀνδρείαν.

<sup>71</sup> Note that Plutarch reports immediately after that, in the following tradition, Zeno's *phronêsis* was interpreted as Zeno's name for 'science' (*epistêmê*).

<sup>72</sup> Pearson (1891), 302.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Stobaeus, *Eclog.*, III, 6, 66, p. 304, 1–2 Hense (*SVF* I 556), attests that Cleanthes mentioned prudence. Hence, while he clearly seems to have suppressed it from the list of cardinal virtues, he does not seem to have deleted prudence. However, the context of the fragment seems to indicate a refutation of an Epicurean doctrine, and *phronêsis* may be used in its Epicurean sense. This does not warrant that Cleanthes admitted prudence.

a cardinal virtue was distinct from prudence as a source-virtue in Zeno). This is actually what he seems to have done if one reads Plutarch's testimony literally.<sup>75</sup>

Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Cleanthes' doctrine gave self-control a central position it did not have in the Platonic tradition of the cardinal virtues. In doing so, of course, Cleanthes may have followed the Xenophontic tradition, as Pearson suggests.<sup>76</sup> For, according to Xenophon, Socrates made self-control the source of virtue.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, there is a clear difference between Xenophon's conception and Cleanthes'. Cleanthes, unlike Xenophon's Socrates, does not consider self-control as the source of all virtue, but only as one of the four cardinal virtues. Thus, the common point between Xenophon and Cleanthes is the importance they give to self-control, and the similarity does not extend further. Pearson asserts that another source for Cleanthes' conception seems to have been the tradition of the Cynics, but the evidence for this is scarce.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to the preceding points, Cleanthes' definition of self-control, as reported by Plutarch, has some other disparities with regard to Stoic standard doctrine. Cleanthes' definition, as the standard Stoic definition, refers to things 'manifest' (*phaneisin*). But although in the standard definition, what is 'manifest' is 'what is in conformity with right reason' (*ta kata to orthon logon*), what is manifest in Cleanthes' definition is 'what must be tolerated' (*emmenetea*). Surprisingly enough, this is the object of endurance (*karteria*) in standard Stoicism as reported by Stobaeus.<sup>79</sup> It is somehow surprising that the object of endurance in standard Stoicism appears to have been previously the object of self-control in Cleanthes. Similarly, the object of courage in Cleanthes,

<sup>75</sup> Pearson, *loc. cit.*, also argues that 'Chrysippus on the other hand restored φρόνησις as the cardinal virtue, but represented by ἐπιστήμη that notion of φρόνησις which was common to Zeno and Cleanthes'.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Xen., *Mem.*, I, 5, 4. See Dorion (2003). Xenophon's imprint on the Stoic tradition was strong: see Long (1988), Erler (2002).

<sup>78</sup> Pearson (1891), 302, alledging D.L. VI, 15, where Crates' self control is reported to stem from Antisthenes, while Zeno's endurance derived also from Antisthenes. On Antisthenes and *enkrateia*, see Brancacci (1993). As Bénatouil (2005) 9–10, argues, it may be the case that the title of Antisthenes' treatise, *Herakles, or on prudence or on strength* implies that *enkrateia* and *phronēsis* were closely linked in Antisthenes.

<sup>79</sup> 'Endurance is knowledge which stands things thanks to correct judgments' (καρτερίαν δὲ ἐπιστήμην ἐμμενητικὴν τοῖς ὀρθῶς κριθέειν), Stob., *Eclog.*, II, 7, 5b2, p. 61, 12–13 W.

‘things to be withstood’, though it is the object of courage in standard Stoicism as reported by Stobaeus,<sup>80</sup> is the object of endurance in Sextus’ version of the Stoic definition.<sup>81</sup> However, Sextus’ version is suspect: he may have introduced something of his own making in the definition of self-control which follows, and his twofold definition of endurance is at odds with the usual threefold definitions of the Stoics (*a*, non-*a*, and what is neither *a* nor non-*a*). Other definitions by Cleanthes seem more to conform to standard Stoicism. First, the objects of justice, ‘values’, may also be found in the standard definition of justice.<sup>82</sup> Second, the objects of moderation, ‘choices and avoidances’, seem to develop the objects of moderation in standard Stoicism, i.e. impulses.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, it is clear that this is mainly the introduction of self-control among the four cardinal virtues that introduces the other discrepancies at odds with standard Stoic conceptions. ‘What must be tolerated’ was the object of self-control in Cleanthes but became the object of endurance in standard Stoicism. One can assume that the reason for this modification is that the word had a broader range and meaning for Cleanthes. For instance, one may assume that it referred to pains to withstand as well as to pleasures to resist.<sup>84</sup> It could even have the meaning of ‘matters requiring persistence’.<sup>85</sup> In turn, this presumably means that self-control in Cleanthes had a much wider meaning than in the later Stoic tradition. After all, this would be consonant with the higher status of self-control as a cardinal virtue. Therefore, self-control could have been for Cleanthes the virtue relating to all non-practical impulses. This is, of course, a mere hypothesis. But it is clear that, conversely, incontinence must have played a prominent role in Cleanthes.

Therefore if one tries to understand Cleanthes’ conception of self-control as a cardinal virtue, one arrives at the following remarks. There is no evidence that self-control ever played a role in Zeno. However, Cleanthes, in order to resolve some difficulties resulting from the ambiguous

<sup>80</sup> ‘Courage deals with things to withstand’ (τὴν δὲ ἀνδρείαν περὶ τὰς ὑπομονάς, Stob., *Eclog.*, II, 7, 5b2, p. 60, 14).

<sup>81</sup> ‘Endurance is the science of things to withstand and things not to withstand’ (καρτερία δὲ ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη ὑπομενετέων καὶ οὐχ ὑπομενετέων, S.E., *M.*, IX, 154).

<sup>82</sup> Stob., *Eclog.*, II, 7, 5b1, p. 59, 11 (*SVF* III 262).

<sup>83</sup> Pearson (1891), 302.

<sup>84</sup> This, of course, does not prevent courage from having its own objects, since the objects of fear and the objects of pain are not the same.

<sup>85</sup> Long-Sedley translation at 61 C (see Cherniss’ translation: ‘things manifestly to be adhered to’).

position of prudence in Zeno's classification, replaced prudence by self-control among the four cardinal virtues inherited by Zeno from the Platonic tradition. In doing so, Cleanthes was also consistent with his general insistence on the physical aspect of virtue, described by him as a sufficient tension of the soul, a 'strength and power'. He was also following Xenophon's Socratic tradition, since Xenophon attributed to Socrates the thesis that self-control was the source or basis of all virtue. However, he went less far than Xenophon on this issue, since he did not consider self-control to be the source of all virtue, as Xenophon did. In contrast to Cleanthes, Chrysippus distinguished strength of soul from the four cardinal virtues, which he decisively described as sciences. He also restored prudence as one of the four cardinal virtues, and gave to self-control the status of a subordinate virtue. Therefore, in the history of Stoicism, self-control quickly lost the central status it acquired only in Cleanthes' version of Stoicism. Nonetheless, Cleanthes' position seems to have influenced Chrysippus in conceiving self-control as a virtue and (consequently) incontinence as a vice. Chrysippus voluntarily subordinated self-control (as a capacity to avoid pleasures) to moderation (as a science of choices and impulses). If self-control is a capacity to avoid pleasure, if pleasure is a species of impulse and if moderation deals with impulse, it is natural and coherent to subordinate self-control to moderation. However, beside this evolution of Stoic doctrine, a certain ambiguity still seems to remain in Chrysippus. This ambiguity was due to the role apparently played by incontinence in Chrysippus' doctrine of passion.

b. *Chrysippus' ambiguities?*

From a comparison with the doctrines of Zeno and Cleanthes, there is no doubt that what has been described in the first part of this paper as 'standard Stoicism' reflects Chrysippus' doctrine. Chrysippus' first move in transforming the doctrine of cardinal virtues was to restore Zeno's list while correcting its ambiguities. This was accompanied by further refinements and sophistications in the doctrine, consisting mainly in a long list of 19 subordinate virtues and vices, among which self-control and incontinence played a subordinate role.

There is no doubt that Chrysippus endorsed the conception according to which self-control and incontinence deal with pleasures. The following fragment of Chrysippus' *On Zeus*, quoted by Plutarch, makes this clear:

Chrysippus speaks as follows in his *On Zeus*: 'Among the deeds which are in accordance with the virtues it is fitting <to praise> those which have in fact been adduced as exemplary. Not figuring among the latter, however, are such acts as courageously extending one's finger, and continently abstaining from an old crone with one foot in the grave, and hearing without precipitate assent 'Three equals four'. One who undertakes to praise and eulogize people by means of such examples gives perfect evidence of a kind of insipidity'. (*Stoic. Repugn.*, 13, 1039 A = *SVF* III 211)<sup>86</sup>

The point debated here refers to three virtues: courage, self-control and non-precipitancy, a dialectical virtue.<sup>87</sup> A parallel quotation, immediately following in Plutarch, gives an excerpt from the third book of Chrysippus' *On gods*, where self-control is paralleled with endurance. In this passage, abstinence from an old woman is paralleled by endurance of the sting of a fly. This clearly shows that the parallel drawn between self-control and endurance in the above-quoted excerpt from Sextus<sup>88</sup> is genuinely Chrysippean. Chrysippus considered these two virtues very close to each other, even if they were subordinate to two different primary virtues. The reason is presumably that these two subordinate virtues were dedicated to the avoidance of two main forms of impulse, pleasure and pain, which are intimately connected. Consequently, they may have been discussed together, despite the fact that they were not subordinated to the same primary virtue.

However, the point at issue in Chrysippus' text is that some cases of abstinence are not praiseworthy, even if they are 'in accordance with virtue' or 'proceeding from a virtue' (*sumbainonta ap' airtês*, in the quotation from *On gods*). As was noted above, following Algra, this is not coherent with Sextus' version, according to whom abstinence from ugly old women is not a case of self-control. It can be argued that Sextus' version, though coherent with the second definition he gives of self-control, is misrepresenting Chrysippus' point of view.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Λέγει [Χρύσιππος] δ' οὕτως ἐν τῷ περὶ τοῦ Διός· 'ἔργων γὰρ κατὰ τὰς ἀρετὰς ὄντων οἰκεῖον ἐστὶ [sc. ἐπαινεῖν] τὰ προενεχθέντα καὶ τούτων, οἷον ἀνδρείως τὸν δάκτυλον ἐκτείνειν καὶ ἐγκρατῶς ἀποσχέσθαι δυσθανατώσεως γραδὸς καὶ ἀπροπτῶτως ἀκοῦσαι τοῦ τὰ τρία τέσσαρα [μὴ] εἶναι. Τελέως τιν' ἐμφαίνει ψυχρίαν ὁ διὰ τῶν τοιούτων ἐπαινεῖν τινὰς ἐγχειρῶν καὶ ἐγκωμιάζειν'. Cherniss text, as emended and translated by Algra (1990), 455.

<sup>87</sup> DL, VII, 46; *PHerc.* 1020, col. IVn = OxNd; see M.A., III, 9, 2; IV, 49, 5; VII, 55, 5. Dialectical virtues are typically Chrysippean.

<sup>88</sup> S.E., M., IX, 153–154.

<sup>89</sup> Algra (1990), 457–8.



It is evident that a quotation by Plutarch is more reliable than Sextus' interpretation. However, it may be more economical to make the following hypothesis, as an alternative to Algra's analysis: abstinence from ugly old women may proceed from the virtue of self-control and, in spite of that, may not be a case of self-control.<sup>90</sup> The reason for that is very simple: if one is virtuous, everything one does proceeds from one's virtue. Therefore, if one controls one's own sexual desires, abstaining from Phryne or Laïs proceeds from one's virtue of self-control. Similarly, if one abstains from an ugly old woman, this will also proceed from one's virtue of self-control. However, this will not be a case of self-control, since one does not need to be virtuous to abstain from an ugly old woman. For self-control, though a capacity to abstain from every pleasure, exerts itself only in pleasures difficult to abstain from (as mentioned in the second definition reported by Sextus), since abstaining from a repulsive woman is not really abstaining from pleasure: rather, in a way, it demands an effort over oneself to have intercourse with an ugly woman. Therefore, one may act from self-control, because it is a general disposition one has, but nevertheless one's action may not be a case of self-control. This hypothesis I cannot warrant to be true (and I admit it may be disputable), but it would have the advantage of retaining Sextus' testimony and harmonizing it with Plutarch's.

Whatever may be the case, it is clear from both testimonies that Chrysippus considered that self-control and incontinence dealt with pleasure, especially sexual pleasure. Besides, a literal quotation from the fourth book of Chrysippus' *On affections* seems to extend the scope of *akrasia* to every passion:

Such states are these of the sort that are out of control, as if the men had no power over themselves but were carried away, just as those who run hard are carried along and have no control over that sort of movement. But those who move with reason as their guide and steer their course by it, no matter what the nature of the reasoning, have control over, or are not subject to, that kind of movement and its impulses. (Galen, *Plac. Hipp. et Plat.*, IV, 4, 24, p. 256, 7–12 De Lacy (*SVF* III 476), De Lacy translation slightly modified)<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Algra's translation of *akrasia* by 'abstinence', instead of 'self-control' is certainly supporting his interpretation. But 'self-control' is more consonant with the idea of a virtue, and 'abstinence' with its application.

<sup>91</sup> Οἷαι καὶ ἀκρατεῖς αἱ τοιαῦται καταστάσεις εἰσὶν, ὥς ἂν οὐ κρατοῦντων ἑαυτῶν, ἀλλ' ἐκφερομένων καθάπερ οἱ τῷ τόνῳ τρέχοντες προσεκφέρονται οὐ κρατοῦντες

Chrysippus is apparently describing here the states of mind of a passionate person as ‘out of control’ (*akrateis*). Hence it seems that every passion may be explained in terms of incontinence (*akrasia*). This apparently gives incontinence a role in every passion, not only in pleasure; this would mean that incontinence deals with passions, while self-control deals only with one kind of passion, pleasure. It is sometimes assumed by modern scholars that Cicero’s testimony confirms that incontinence is the source of every passion, for twice at least he writes that *intemperantia* is the source of all passions. It has been assumed, notably by Zeller, that *intemperantia* in the text of the *Tusculan Disputations* is a translation of *akrasia*.<sup>92</sup>

Omnium autem perturbationum fontem esse dicunt intemperantiam, quae est [a] tota mente et a recta ratione defectio, sic aversa a praescriptione rationis, ut nullo modo adpetitiones animi nec regi nec contineri queant. Quem ad modum igitur temperantia sedat adpetitiones et efficit, ut eae rectae rationis pareant, conservatque considerata iudicia mentis, sic huic inimica intemperantia omnem animi statum inflamat, conturbat, incitat, itaque et aegritudines et metus et reliquae perturbationes omnes gignuntur ex ea. (23) Quemadmodum, cum sanguis corruptus est aut pituita redundat aut bilis, in corpore morbi aegrotationesque nascuntur: sic pravarium opinionum conturbatio et ipsarum inter se repugnantia sanitate spoliatur animum morbisque perturbat. (IV, 22–23 Pohlenz = *SVF* III 379 + 424)

[Zeno] putabat [...] omnium perturbationum matrem esse immoderatam quandam intemperantiam. (Cic., *Ac. Post.*, I, 39, sketching Zeno’s doctrine on ethics)

Tieleman thinks there is a confirmation in Cicero’s text that *akrasia* was for Chrysippus the source of all passions. Unfortunately, this is obviously erroneous.<sup>93</sup> For Cicero explicitly says that *temperantia* is one of his standard translations for *sôphrosunê*, alongside *moderatio*.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, *intemperantia* in both texts is Cicero’s translation for *akolasia*, the opposite of *sôphrosunê*, moderation.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, translations of

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τῆς τοιαύτης κινήσεως. οἱ δὲ κατὰ τὸν λόγον κινούμενοι ὡς ἂν ἡγεμόνα καὶ τούτῳ οἰακίζοντες, καὶ ὅποισσόν ἦ, κρατοῦσιν ἥτοι ἀπαθείς εἰσι τῆς τοιαύτης κινήσεως καὶ τῶν κατ’ αὐτὴν ὁρμῶν.

<sup>92</sup> Zeller (1909), III-1, 234, n. 4; Tieleman (2003), 300. Note that Zeller (1909) is the edition I have consulted. The book was originally published in 1852. Note also that Tieleman, instead of *intemperantia*, prints *intemperamentia*, a non-existing word.

<sup>93</sup> This is one of the very few defects of an almost perfect book.

<sup>94</sup> Cic., *Tusc.*, III, 16. See Liscu (1930), 262.

<sup>95</sup> See Reid (1885), 149.

the two texts must run as follows, where intemperance stands for the Greek *akolasia*:

Further, they say that the source of all passions is intemperance, which is a desertion of the whole mind from the guidance of right reason, so completely alien from the control of reason that the impulses of the soul cannot be guided or curbed. Therefore, just as moderation allays the impulses and causes them to obey to right reason, and maintains the well considered judgments of the mind, so intemperance its enemy kindles, confounds and agitates the whole condition of the soul, with the result that from it come distress and fear and all other passions. (King translation modified)

[Zeno] held that the mother of all the emotions was a sort of intemperance and lack of moderation. (Rackham translation)

Thus, what we have here is not evidence that Chrysippus considered *akrasia* to be the source of all emotions,<sup>96</sup> but evidence that all Stoics, from Zeno onwards, considered *akolosia* to be the source of all emotions. This is not surprising, since the standard Stoic conception of moderation is that it 'deals with man's impulses',<sup>97</sup> as was noted above. Therefore, it is coherent that the opposite vice, dealing with man's impulses, is the source of all passions, since passion is a kind of impulse.<sup>98</sup> However, if this is so, it is all the more surprising that Chrysippus says in his *On Affections* that impassioned states of mind are *incontinent* states of mind, not *intemperate* states of mind. According to Sorabji, Galen's rather isolated quotation seems to be confirmed by a text of Seneca, who describes passion as *motus impotens*:

In order that you may know how emotions begin or grow, or are carried away, the first movement is involuntary like a preparation for emotion and a kind of threat. The second movement is accompanied by will, not an obstinate one, to the effect that it is appropriate for him to be punished since he has committed a crime. The third movement is by now uncontrolled (*impotens*), and wills to be avenged, not if it is appropriate but

<sup>96</sup> A good argument in favour of *akrasia* here is that § 23 refers to a bad mingling of humours as one of the constitutive factors of passion (cf. Tieleman (2003), 148 sq.). But, of all evidence, the Stoic definitions of *akrasia* take it as synonymous to *akrateia* and opposed to *enkrateia*, stressing the capacity or incapacity to dominate (*kratein*) oneself, not as referring to a bad mixture (*krasis*).

<sup>97</sup> Stob., *Eclg.*, II, 7, 5b, p. 60, 14 (*SVF* III 264): περὶ τὰς ὁρμὰς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

<sup>98</sup> Contrary to what I assumed above, we would have to assume here that moderation and intemperance deal with impulses in the broader sense, including repulsions as well, not in the strict sense of impulse as opposed to repulsion.

come what may, and it has overthrown reason. (*De ira*, II, 4, 1; Sorabji's translation in Sorabji (2000), 62)<sup>99</sup>

Sorabji argues that there is some difference between Chrysippus' description and Seneca's, but that, basically, Seneca's position is a defence of Chrysippus' conception.<sup>100</sup> According to him, 'all emotions seem to be thought of by Chrysippus as involving *akrasia* in the sense of conflict with one's better judgment'.<sup>101</sup> However, this is hardly what is argued by Chrysippus or by Seneca in any of the passages Sorabji refers to. For what Chrysippus or Seneca talks about are 'uncontrolled states', or 'uncontrolled movement'; they do not speak of *akrasia* in the sense of 'conflict with one's better judgment'. Moreover, De Lacy's translation of Galen's quotation appears to be somewhat misleading. According to De Lacy, Chrysippus says that 'such states are *these of the sort that are out of control, as if the men had no power* over themselves but were carried away, just as those who run hard are carried along and have no control over that sort of movement'. However, what Chrysippus seems to me to be saying is that 'such states are *like those which are out of control, as if they were movements of people who have no power* over themselves but are carried away, just as those who run hard are carried along and have no control over that sort of movement'. In other words, Chrysippus does not say that impassioned states of mind are out of control (*akrateis*), he says that they are comparable to *akrateis* states. Uncontrolled states are not what impassioned states are; they are, rather, what impassioned states are compared to. The passage quoted by Galen does not involve *akrasia*; instead, it involves a comparison with lack of control. Moreover, 'out of control' here explicitly does not refer to a conflict within man's soul; it refers to the impossibility of controlling bodily movements when running. It has none of the moral connotations of *akrasia*, since impassioned states are compared to the physical condition of runners who cannot control their running, and cannot stop immediately.<sup>102</sup> This is why, in Seneca's text, the *motus impotens* is the last step: it is the consequence

<sup>99</sup> Et ut scias quemadmodum incipiant affectus aut crescant aut efferantur, est primus motus non voluntarius, quasi praeparatio affectus et quaedam comminatio; alter cum voluntate non contumaci, tanquam oporteat me vindicari cum laesus sim aut oporteat hunc poenas dare cum scelus fecerit; tertius motus est iam impotens, qui non si oportet ulcisci uult sed utique, qui rationem euicit.

<sup>100</sup> Sorabji (2000), 54–65.

<sup>101</sup> Sorabji (2000), 313; see Sorabji (2000), 56 and Sorabji (2002), 227.

<sup>102</sup> The image is developed more at length by Chrysippus in an earlier quotation by Galen, *Plac. Hipp. Plat.*, IV, 2, 10–18 (Long-Sedley 65 J).

in the previous steps in passion (having an initial impulse, and then assenting to it). A passion consists in assenting to an unreasonable impulse, which, once assented to, becomes like the impossibility of stopping immediately when running, compared to walking. When one is in an impassioned state, this state is 'out of control', as is a run-up when one is running. Therefore, Chrysippus does not 'describe emotion as involving *akrasia*',<sup>103</sup> he describes impassioned states of minds as being comparable to the condition of a runner who cannot stop immediately because of the momentum of his running.

Nonetheless, it is perfectly true that, in many cases, Chrysippus describes passion as involving 'conflict with one's better judgment', and as being a rebellion against 'one's better judgment'. But it is not true that he would apply the notion of *akrasia* to this conflict or rebellion. As in the case of Medea, one may still see what is the best for one, and yet refuse to assent to the impression one has of the best. This is clearly what usually involves *akrasia*, in Plato or Aristotle: desire rules over reason. But, in such cases, Chrysippus denies that there is an irrational power dominating reason. What happens is that Medea, instead of choosing reason over impulse, chooses an isolated impulse over right reason.<sup>104</sup> Reason, especially right reason, is a set of notions and preconceptions.<sup>105</sup> Thus, passion consists in rejecting this set of notions and choosing the impulsive impression, because it is more vivid and vigorous than reason. In the case of Medea, this rejection of right reason is deliberate.<sup>106</sup> In her case, there is a conflict between her preconceptions of what is morally right and her impulsive impression

<sup>103</sup> Sorabji (2002), 227.

<sup>104</sup> See Gourinat (1996), 102, 105 f.; Tieleman (2003), 172 and n. 117. Galen, *Plac. Hipp. Plat.*, IV, 2, 27, p. 244, 2–9 provides a criticism of Chrysippus' explanation of Medea's case, but, in the absence of a literal quotation, it is difficult to make a distinction between Chrysippus' analysis and Galen's criticism: see Gill (1983), 140, 147 n. 24.

<sup>105</sup> Gal., *Plac. Hipp. Plat.*, V, 3, p. 304, 35 De Lacy (*SVF* II 841).

<sup>106</sup> As mentioned above, passion is 'contrary to the right and natural reason'. However, not all passions happen by deliberately rejecting the best while perceiving it: Stobaeus' description clearly implies that impassioned people do not always realize that they deliberately reject reason (Stob., *Eclog.*, II, p. 88, 8–90, 6 Long-Sedley 65 A). Chrysippus' distinction between passion and error of judgments has two implications: it means that (1) in some cases, someone sees the best and rejects it, but it also means that (2) passions are not only theoretical errors, since, in passion, misjudgement is accompanied by an impulse, and this impulse may remain while the judgment fades out. Therefore, you may have a passion without *consciously* rejecting right reason, even if, of course, you are *actually* rejecting it.

that she has been harmed and hence that revenge is appropriate.<sup>107</sup> The strength of the impression is that to which Medea yields. She does see the right thing to do, but this is less strong than the impression that she should take her revenge.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, it is true that one of Chrysippus' definition of *enkrateia* as 'a disposition not to go beyond what manifestly conforms to right reason' seems to fit rather well with Chrysippus' conception of passion as an excessive impulse turning away from right reason. This seems to induce us to understand self-control as the virtue which prevents us from yielding to passions, not only from yielding to pleasure. Consequently, this could mean that incontinence is the vice leading us to every passion. However, Chrysippus never explicitly makes such an assertion in the surviving evidence. It is more probable that he thought that incontinence was a vice which could lead us to passions, that it was one of the causes of some passions, especially pleasure. Therefore, as is probable, the two definitions of self-control complete each other. The reference to the conformity with right reason should not be understood as different from the definition asserting that self-control is 'a capacity which cannot be defeated by pleasure'.

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<sup>107</sup> Gourinat (1996), 102, 105. On Medea's case, see also Gill (1983), Joyce (1995), 325–35 and Sorabji (2002), 227–8. However, contrary to what Joyce implies, and contrary to what Sorabji and Tieleman (2003), 172, maintain, this is not supposed by Chrysippus to be a case of *akrasia*: Chrysippus does *not* 'explain Medea's anger in terms of incontinence'.

<sup>108</sup> This is presumably different from cases of quick shift from a judgment to another, which explains the volatility of passions. See Tieleman's discussion of Sorabji's hypothesis that passion always involves an 'oscillation' between two judgments in Tieleman (2003), 104, n. 61. According to Tieleman, Sorabji confuses the explanation of what others thinkers assume to be *akrasia* with Zeno's physical description of passion as 'fluttering' (*ptoia*). As Tieleman argues, the quick change of opinion described in Plut., *Virt. Mor.* 7, 446F–447A (Long-Sedley 65 G), is an explanation for cases usually explained in terms of *akrasia*, but this is not the source of all passions. See Tieleman (2003), 102–14 on Chrysippus' theory of the cause of emotions: as Tieleman shows, the cause of emotions is the incoming of impressions on a weak soul, lacking the proper physical tension. See also Gourinat (1996) 106–7. However, there is more plausibility than Tieleman maintains to the idea that 'fluttering' applies to the volatility of passions, as was already argued by Long-Sedley (1987), I, 422.

*Conclusions*

Based on the preceding discussion, it seems evident that the Stoics did not conceive of self-control and incontinence the way their predecessors did. *Akrasia* and self-control have a very definite role to play in Stoic ethics: they deal with pleasure, and this is close to the role they played in the pre-Stoic tradition, but they pertain to pleasure as a vice and a virtue respectively, which is more original. In this respect, *akrasia* is a vice subordinated to intemperance, and self-control is a virtue subordinated to moderation. Thus, they play a subordinate role. However, one of the Stoic definitions of self-control is not so restrictive and seems to extend the scope of self-control to all passions. Since moderation has as its object impulses in general, one could understand that a lack of self-control may be the source of passions, since passions constitute only one kind of impulse. Nevertheless, this would lead to some incoherence, since one virtue subordinate to courage, namely endurance, apparently deals with pain. Therefore, one can certainly say that if self-control is a virtue preventing us from going beyond the limits of right reason, it protects us against passions. However, this is not what Chrysippus seems to have explicitly said, though Clemens of Alexandria's testimony clearly explores that possibility. Instead, he seems to have quite traditionally maintained that self-control and incontinence were specifically related to pleasure. The alternative definition may have been a hold-over from Cleanthes' broader conception of self-control as a cardinal virtue. Evidence of the central role of self-control and incontinence in Chrysippus' analysis of emotions remains scarce. However, some texts illustrate a tendency to extend the scope of self-control and incontinence beyond pleasure, and to make incontinence, if not the *source* of all passion, then at least the virtue and vice *dealing with* passions. One cannot say whether this was because some ancient writers had misunderstood Chrysippus' doctrine, or because later Stoics had modified it, or because Chrysippus himself remained ambiguous or changed his mind. In any case, that was not the mainstream conception in Chrysippus or in the Stoic school. Standard Stoicism more frequently limited self-control and incontinence to the control of pleasures.





## EPICTETUS ON MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PRECIPITATE ACTION

RICARDO SALLES

Aristotle's action theory establishes a distinction between two different kinds of *akrasia*: weakness (*astheneia*) and precipitancy (*propeteia*).<sup>1</sup> The characteristic feature of weakness is that the agent, having deliberated about how best to achieve a certain goal and based a choice on his deliberation, acts against choice (*para proairesin*). It is this type of *akrasia* that modern action theorists refer to when they speak of 'incontinence' or 'weakness of the will' in Aristotle. But precipitate *akrasia* differs substantially from weakness. Its characteristic feature is that the agent is led by his desires for pleasure because he has not deliberated at all. In this case, the agent does not act *against* a previous deliberated choice or *proairesis*, because there is none to be acted against. It is nonetheless a case of *akrasia*, or 'lack of self-control', precisely because of the lack of restraint that is manifest in the agent's following whatever appears to him to be pleasant. Thus, weakness and precipitancy are both irrational, but in different ways. Weakness is irrational because the agent acts against reason, which *is* present in his psychology in the form of a choice based on a prior deliberation. Precipitancy, by contrast, is irrational because reason is absent from the agent's psychology altogether: he simply did not form a choice based on a prior deliberation.

It is well known that in the central chapters of the seventh book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* devoted to *akrasia* Aristotle does not pay as much attention to precipitancy as he does to weakness. But something that is less well-known is that precipitancy—and under that very name: *propeteia*—was given considerable attention in Roman Stoicism by Epictetus. Why was Epictetus, in contrast with Aristotle, interested in this phenomenon? One possible answer is that it poses a difficulty for the ascription of responsibility that arises directly from earlier Stoic theories of responsibility, which are of course later than Aristotle. An important element of early Stoic thinking about responsibility is that to

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<sup>1</sup> See *NE* VII 7, 1150b19–22. Cf. 10, 1152a18–19.

be responsible for an action it is sufficient that the agent acted from a decision or impulse that is based on a prior reasoning. The thesis may be attributed to Chrysippus and the motivation that underlies it is that, if the thesis is correct, responsibility does not require, in addition, the possibility to act otherwise. And this would prove that the libertarian is wrong in insisting that this possibility is a necessary condition for responsibility.<sup>2</sup> Now, the Chrysippean thesis leaves it unexplained why agents who act *without* any prior reasoning may also be responsible. And here comes the philosophical problem that motivates Epictetus' interest in the phenomenon of precipitancy. If the reason why reflective agents are responsible is that they are convinced by their reasoning that they should act as they do, why should precipitate agents be responsible if they do not carry out this sort of reasoning? Although Epictetus agrees with Chrysippus on the idea that the kind of reasoning envisaged by Chrysippus is sufficient for responsibility, he complements the latter's theory by providing an explanation of why actions done in the absence of reason may also be responsible. Thus it is because of Chrysippus that Epictetus came to be so interested in precipitancy and this may be why his interest in the phenomenon is at least greater than Aristotle's. In the present essay, I shall argue that Epictetus' argument for the ascription of responsibility to precipitate agents hinges on the idea that precipitancy is in itself a condition that one ought to avoid. In consequence, if I behaved badly because I acted precipitately, my precipitancy cannot count as an exculpating factor. I therefore become genuinely liable to blame and punishment for my behaviour. This argument (henceforth the 'Normative Argument') rests on a certain conception of human nature that I shall explore in some detail.

The present paper is divided into two sections. Section 1 deals with the nature of precipitancy in Epictetus. It is brought out through a comparison between the psychology of precipitate action and the psychology of action of the fully rational agent. Section 2, is devoted to discussing the central thesis of the Normative Argument, namely, that precipitancy is not an exculpating factor inasmuch as it is in itself a condition that we ought to avoid.

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<sup>2</sup> This interpretation of Chrysippean compatibilism is argued for in detail in chapter 4 of Salles (2005).

### 1. *The psychology of precipitate action*

In Epictetus, *propeteia* is a pattern of mental behaviour consisting in the repeated failure to examine critically first impressions before reacting to them.<sup>3</sup> There are different degrees of precipitancy, the highest of which is found in persons whom Epictetus calls ‘maniacs’ (*mainomenoi*). Crucially, the psychology of such agents does not ever involve the critical examination of impressions that often, or at least sometimes, characterises most of us. The Epictetan maniac follows whatever impressions he forms:

What are they called those who follow all the things that appear to them?—Maniacs. (D 1.28.33)<sup>4</sup>

As I mentioned, there are circumstances in which most of us may display some precipitancy, especially when we are obliged to decide on an important matter. Its importance is so overwhelming that it constrains us to react without proper reflection. In such circumstances, our psychology resembles that of the maniac. To quote Epictetus:

But where the first and only cause is concerned of either acting rightly or going wrong, of happiness or adversity, or success or failure, there only do we act rashly and precipitately. Nowhere anything like a balance, nowhere anything like a standard, but something appears and I immediately perform it. (D 1.28.30)<sup>5</sup>

The difference between the maniac, who constitutes an extreme case, and most of us would be that the former is *always* precipitate. In order to understand better the kind of failure that characterises Epictetan precipitancy, it is necessary to compare the psychology of the precipitate agent to that of the Stoic sage.

The central difference between the Epictetan precipitate agent and the Stoic sage lies in how each of them reacts to those impressions that, according to Stoic action theory, need to be assented to in order for an action to occur—impressions that were referred to by the early Stoics

<sup>3</sup> See *Discourses* [henceforth ‘D’] 1.28.30 (quoted below in this section); 2.1.10; 3.22.104; 4.4.46; 4.8.1; and 4.13.5.

<sup>4</sup> *Τίνες δὲ λέγονται οἱ παντὶ τῷ φαινομένῳ ἀκολουθοῦντες;—Μαινόμενοι.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ὅπου δὲ τὸ πρῶτον καὶ μόνον αἰτίον ἐστὶ τοῦ κατορθοῦν ἢ ἀμαρτάνειν, τοῦ εὐροεῖν ἢ δυσροεῖν, τοῦ ἀτυχεῖν ἢ εὐτυχεῖν, ἐνθάδε μόνον εἰκαῖοι καὶ προπετεῖς. οὐδαμοῦ ὁμοίων τι ζυγῷ, οὐδαμοῦ ὁμοίων τι κανόνι, ἀλλὰ τι ἐφάνη καὶ εὐθὺς ποιῶ τὸ φανέν.*

by the term ‘impulsive impressions’ (*phantasiai hormêtikai*).<sup>6</sup> An impulsive impression is one that presents a course of action as worth pursuing (or avoiding)—an idea that the early Stoics express by describing the content of impulsive impressions in terms of a proposition such as *I ought to Φ*, or *it is appropriate (kathêkon) for me to Φ*, where Φ is an action. Now, a fully rational agent will not assent to a first practical impression without having first examined it. The examination is aimed at determining whether the course of action that the impression presents is indeed as it appears, i.e. whether Φ is really appropriate or something that I should do. If the content of impression in question is that Φ is appropriate, and if Φ is found to be as it appears, then the impression is given assent. The assent yields in this case what some modern philosophers would call a ‘pro-attitude’ towards the action, which one ancient source describes as being identical to an impulse (*hormê*).<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, if the impression presents Φ as something to be avoided (or otherwise inappropriate) and Φ is found to be as it appears, the impression is given assent, even though in this case the assent does not yield an impulse for the action, but the opposite attitude, namely, one of aversion or avoidance (*aphormê*), which is defined as a ‘sort of motion of the mind away from something in the sphere of action’ (*phoran tina <dianoias apo tinos tôn en tōi prattein>*).<sup>8</sup> Otherwise, if the impression is found to be misleading (either because it is found to present an appropriate action as inappropriate or an inappropriate one as appropriate), the impression is not given assent and, hence, no impulse (or aversion) arises.

This characterisation of the sage in terms of someone who does not assent to first impressions without a prior critical examination of them goes back to the earliest Stoics.<sup>9</sup> But it is also well attested for Epictetus as I shall now argue.

At D 1.20.7, Epictetus speaks of the greatest and primary distinctive activity of a philosopher. It consists in always testing (*dokimazein*) and

<sup>6</sup> See Stobaeus [henceforth ‘E’] 2.86,17–87,6 Wachsmuth (also in von Arnim (1903) [henceforth ‘SVF’] 3.169 and Long and Sedley (1987) [henceforth ‘LS’] 53Q). For discussion, see Long (1976), 90–1; LS 2, 318; Inwood (1985), 224 and Annas (1992), 91.

<sup>7</sup> E 2.88, 1–6 (SVF 3.171; LS 33I).

<sup>8</sup> E 2.87, 6–7. I follow most editors, and more recently Inwood (1985), 227, in deleting the *μη* in Wachsmuth’s supplement of the lacuna.

<sup>9</sup> See *Herculaneum Papyrus* 1020, col. 4 col. 1 (SVF 2.131; LS 41D) and E 2.111,18–112, 8 (SVF 3.548; LS 41G): precipitancy (*προπτωσία*), or being precipitate (*τὸ προπίπτειν*), is a mark of the non-sage i.e. of everyone except the sage.

judging (*diakrinein*)<sup>10</sup> first impressions before eventually accepting them, as opposed to accepting them automatically. When the Epictetan philosopher assents to an impression, he comes to believe that things are as they appear in the impression. But he will not assent to it unless it has been submitted to this trial.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore the primary and greatest distinctive activity of a philosopher is to test impressions and select them, and not admit any that has not been tested. (D.1.20.7)<sup>12</sup>

Modern scholars have rightly remarked that in Stoic epistemology fully rational agents will not critically examine cataleptic impressions before assenting to them.<sup>13</sup> More precisely, (i) in purely theoretical contexts, once the subject forms a cataleptic impression that something is the case, he will assent to the impression straightaway and by necessity; and (ii) in practical contexts, once the agent forms the cataleptic or clear impression that something is good for him to do, he will assent to the impression also straightaway and by necessity. These two claims are attested in our sources for Stoics earlier than Epictetus and for Epictetus himself.<sup>14</sup> But they do not contradict the present passage. For neither of them precludes that some examination be required to

<sup>10</sup> For this meaning of the term, see Cl. Alex., *strom.* 2.20.110 (SVF 2.714 p. 205, 7–9): ‘But, since the rational capacity is specific to the human soul, it should not exercise impulse in the same way as irrational animals do, but instead judge the presentations and not be carried away with them’ (Ἡ λογικὴ δὲ δύναμις ἰδίᾳ οὐσα τῆς ἀνθρωπείας ψυχῆς οὐχ ὡσαύτως τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζώοις ὁρμᾶν ὀφείλει, ἀλλ’ καὶ διακρίνειν τὰς φαντασίας καὶ μὴ συναποφύρεσθαι αὐταῖς).

<sup>11</sup> For the definition of cataleptic impression, see Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* Bury [henceforth ‘M’] 7.248 (LS 40E 3, SVF 2.65). It should be from ‘what is’ (ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος), ‘moulded and stamped in accordance with that very thing which is’ (κατ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπομεμαγμένη καὶ ἐναπεσφαγισμένη), and ‘of a kind which could not arise from what is not’ (ὁποῖα οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπάρχοντος).

<sup>12</sup> Διὰ τοῦτο ἔργον τοῦ φιλοσόφου τὸ μέγιστον καὶ πρῶτον δοκιμάζειν τὰς φαντασίας καὶ διακρίνειν καὶ μηδεμίαν ἀδοκίμαστον προσφύρεσθαι.

<sup>13</sup> See Long (1976), 84–5 and Inwood (1985), 239.

<sup>14</sup> For (i) see M 7.257: ‘In these cases, the cataleptic impression is not the criterion of truth in a strict sense, but only when it has no impediment. For this impression, being clear and striking it lays hold of us almost by the hair and drags us to assent’ (Ἐνθὲνδε οὐχ ἀπλῶς κριτήριον γίνεται τῆς ἀληθείας ἢ καταληπτικὴ φαντασία, ἀλλ’ ὅταν μὴδὲν ἐνσθημα ἔχῃ. αὕτη γὰρ ἐναργὴς οὐσα καὶ πληκτικὴ μόνον οὐχὶ τῶν τριχῶν, φασί, λαμβάνεται, κατασπῶσα ἡμᾶς εἰς συγκατάθεσιν). For (ii) see Epictetus, D 3.3.4: ‘The good appears and moves straightaway the soul towards itself, and the bad repels it. A soul will not refuse a clear impression of something good any more than it will refuse the coinage of Caesar’ (Τὸ ἀγαθὸν φανὲν εὐθὺς ἐκίνησεν ἐφ’ αὐτό, τὸ κακὸν ἀφ’ αὐτοῦ. οὐδέποτε δ’ ἀγαθοῦ φαντασίαν ἐναργῇ ἀποδοκιμάσει ψυχὴ, οὐ μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ Καίσαρος νόμισμα). For discussion of the Sextus passage see Burnyeat (1980), 42n38.

determine whether a given impression is cataleptic or clear in the first place. In fact, there is evidence that such an examination is indeed required. For it is possible that someone forms a cataleptic impression but finds it unconvincing (*apistos*) given the particular external circumstances in which the impression is formed. In other words, it may not be immediately evident to a person that an impression he has formed is indeed cataleptic. On the other hand, it is also possible that one forms a non-cataleptic impression that strikes one as cataleptic. These two possibilities are actually envisaged by Epictetus in two further passages: D 1.27.1–2 (A) and 3.8.1–5 (B).<sup>15</sup>

In A, Epictetus introduces the figure of the *pepaideumenos*—the person who has already completed his philosophical training. The *pepaideumenos* is said to hit the mark (*eustochein*) whenever he puts aside misleading impressions, namely, (a) impressions of things that are not, but appear to be, so and so (*ouk esti kai phainetai*), and (b) impressions of things that are, but do not appear to be, so and so (*esti kai ou phainetai*).

[A] Impressions come to us in four ways. For either <1> things are, and appear so to us; or <2> they are not, and do not appear to be; or <3> they are, and do not appear to be; or <4> they are not, and yet appear to be. Thus it is the distinctive activity of the person who has completed his philosophical training to hit the mark in all these cases. (D 1.27.1–2)<sup>16</sup>

Now, we know it is distinctive of the philosopher always to examine his impressions critically. So, the success mentioned in the present passage presupposes that the *pepaideumenos*, being the person who has completed his philosophical training—always examines each of his impressions, (however swiftly).<sup>17</sup> In B, cataleptic impressions are explicitly

<sup>15</sup> For the former possibility, see also M 7.253–4 and 256: ‘For there will be times in which a cataleptic impression is formed but is unconvincing given the external circumstances. For example when Heracles presented himself to Admetus bringing back Alcestis from the grave, Admetus received a cataleptic impression from Alcestis, but did not find it likely [...] For Admetus reached the conclusion that Alcestis was dead and that the dead do not come back, although sometimes certain demons do rove about’ (ἔσθ’ ὅτε γὰρ καταληπτική μὲν προσπίπτει φαντασία, ἄπιστος δὲ διὰ τὴν ἔξωθεν περίστασιν. οἷον ὅτε Ἀδμητος ὁ Ἡρακλῆς τὴν Ἀλκησὶν γῆθεν ἀναγαγὼν παρέστησε, τότε ὁ Ἀδμητος ἔσπασε μὲν καταληπτικὴν φαντασίαν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀκλήστιδος, ἡπίσται δ’ αὐτῇ (...)) ὁ τε γὰρ Ἀδμητος ἐλογίζετο ὅτι τέθνηκεν ἡ Ἀκλήστις καὶ ὅτι ὁ ἀποθανὼν οὐκέτι ἀνίσταται, ἀλλὰ δαιμόνιά τινά ποτε ἐπιφοιτᾷ).

<sup>16</sup> Τετραχῶς αἱ φαντασίαι γίνονται ἡμῖν: ἢ γὰρ ἔστι τινὰ καὶ οὕτως φαίνεται ἢ οὐκ ὄντα οὐδὲ φαίνεται ὅτι ἔστιν ἢ ἔστι καὶ οὐ φαίνεται ἢ οὐκ ἔστι καὶ φαίνεται. λοιπὸν ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις εὐστοχεῖν ἔργον ἐστὶ τοῦ πεπαιδευμένου.

<sup>17</sup> See also D 3.2.5, where Epictetus suggests that, not even in dreams, intoxication and depression, someone who is already making progress in his education will let an

referred to. It deals with how to achieve a state in which one only assents to cataleptic impressions. Any progress in this direction requires exercise (*gumnazesthai*). This suggests that it may not be immediately evident which impressions are cataleptic and which are not, and, therefore, that a successful discrimination requires a prior examination of them. And as we know, this examination is required even when our training has been completed and perfected.

[B] In the same way as we exercise ourselves to deal with sophistical questioning, we should exercise ourselves daily to deal with impressions; for these too put questions to us. (...) And if we make this our habit we shall make progress, for we shall never assent to anything but that of which we get a convincing impression. (D 3.8.1–4)<sup>18</sup>

Passages A and B, therefore, help to establish that in Epictetus a critical examination of first impressions is indeed constitutive of full rationality in practical contexts. If a fully rational agent ever assents to a given impression, his act of assent will have been preceded, and supported, by the reasoning he used to examine the impression and through which he determined that it presents things as they really are. The same applies to the impulse that follows the act of assent when the impression assented to is of a course of action as something to be done or appropriate. In contrast, the Epictetan *precipitate* agent will assent automatically to whatever first impressions he forms, which means that in practical contexts he will not stop to consider whether an action presented as something to be done or appropriate is really as it appears. The critical examination of impressions that we find in the fully rational agent is simply absent from the psychology of action of the precipitate agent.

I now turn to Epictetus' Normative Argument for the ascription of responsibility to precipitate agents.

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unexamined impression slip by (cf. Cleanthes *ap.* Diogenes Laertius [henceforth DL] 7.127).

<sup>18</sup> Ὡς πρὸς τὰ ἐρωτήματα τὰ σοφιστικά γυμναζόμεθα, οὕτως καὶ πρὸς τὰς φαντασίας καθ' ἡμέραν ἔδει γυμνάζεσθαι: προτείνουσι γὰρ ἡμῖν καὶ αὐταὶ ἐρωτήματα (...) κἂν οὕτως ἐθιζόμεθα, προκόψομεν: οὐδέποτε γὰρ ἄλλω συγκαταθησόμεθα ἢ οὐ φαντασία καταληπτική γίνεται.

## 2. *Epictetus' 'Normative Argument'*

The gist of the Normative Argument is that precipitancy is a condition that we ought to avoid. The reasons given by Epictetus for this claim are to be found in a set of two theses about human nature. (1) Human nature has a normative force: whatever capacities constitute our specific difference within the scale of nature, they are such that we ought to use them. (2) According to the scale of nature, the specific difference of humans within the animal genus is that, although we 'use impressions' (*chrômetha phantasiôn*) as non-human animals do, we also have the capacity to reflect on, or 'understand', our use of impressions (*parakolouthomen tēi chrēsei tōn phantasiōn*). The nature of this distinction has been well described by others.<sup>19</sup> The lower animals (unlike e.g. plants) base their reactions to the world on the impressions they form. But humans, unlike the lower animals, have the capacity not to accept whatever impressions they form, but to accept some and reject others through the use of reason. As a consequence of these two theses, precipitancy—whereby we tend to accept all the impressions we form—is something that we ought to avoid and, therefore, we are blameworthy if we fail to avoid it. Evidence for these two theses comes in paragraphs 18–21 of D 1.6:

God constitutes each of the animals for some use, one to be eaten, another to serve in farming, another for the production of cheese, and yet another for some other similar use; and relative to these uses, what is the need of understanding impressions and of being capable to judge them? But god has introduced humans into the world as spectators of himself and of his works; and not only as a spectators, but also interpreters of them. For this reason, it is shameful that humans should begin and end where the lower animals do. Rather, they ought rather to begin there, but to end where nature itself has fixed our end. But it has fixed our end in contemplation, understanding and a way of life in harmony with nature.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See Bonhöffer (1890), 74–6, Hadot (1992), 169–79 (where an attempt is made to trace back the origin of Epictetus' notion of παρακολούθησις to Chrysippus); and Hahm (1992).

<sup>20</sup> Ἐκείνων ἕκαστον κατασκευάζει τὸ μὲν ὥστ' ἐσθίεσθαι, τὸ δ' ὥστε ὑπηρετεῖν εἰς γεωργίαν, τὸ δ' ὥστε τυρὸν φέρειν, τὸ δ' ἄλλο ἐπ' ἄλλῃ χρεῖα παραπλησίῳ, πρὸς ἃ τίς χρεῖα τοῦ παρακολουθεῖν ταῖς φαντασίαις καὶ αὐτάς διακρίνειν δύνασθαι; τὸν δ' ἄνθρωπον θεατὴν εἰσήγαγεν αὐτοῦ τε καὶ τῶν ἔργων τῶν αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐ μόνον θεατὴν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξηγητὴν αὐτῶν. διὰ τοῦτο αἰσχρὸν ἐστὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἄρχεσθαι καὶ καταλήγειν ὅπου καὶ τὰ ἄλογα, ἀλλὰ μάλλον ἐνθεν μὲν ἄρχεσθαι, καταλήγειν δὲ ἐφ' ᾧ κατέληξεν ἐφ' ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ φύσις. κατέληξεν δ' ἐπὶ θεωρίαν καὶ παρακολούθησιν καὶ σύμφωνον διεξαγωγὴν τῇ φύσει.



(2) is explicitly stated. Regarding (1), it is logically implied. For it is presupposed by the inference made Epictetus from the idea that the mere use of impressions falls short of human nature to the idea that it is shameful (*aischron*) for us merely to use them. As for the notion of blame, consider D 3.26.9, where Epictetus makes it clear that he uses the term ‘shameful’ to denote the class of things that are blameworthy:

Have you never heard that the shameful is blameworthy, and the blameworthy is that which deserves blame?<sup>21</sup>

Before I move on, it is noteworthy that more evidence for (1) in Epictetus may be gathered from his use of the phrase *kata phusin*. To take an example, in paragraphs 4–8 of D 1.11, ‘ $\Phi$ -ing is natural’ is used to entail ‘ $\Phi$ -ing is right (*orthós*)’ and, thus, to imply that  $\Phi$  is a course of action that one ought to pursue. On the other hand, ‘ $\Phi$ -ing is something that most people do’ does not imply, and may in fact be irrelevant to decide whether, ‘ $\Phi$ -ing is natural’. The contrast intended by Epictetus between ‘natural’ (*kata phusin*) and ‘unnatural’ (*para phusin*), corresponds not so much to the difference between what we generally do and what we generally don’t do, as to the difference between what we ought, and what we ought not, to do. And it follows from this that, since precipitancy is at variance with human nature (*para phusin*), it is something that we ought to avoid.

There is one important proviso to the Normative Argument, with which I deal in the remainder of this section. According to the argument, precipitate agents are blameworthy because their precipitancy is something that ought to be avoided. But there is a potential difficulty in this inference. Precipitancy cannot be something that one ought to avoid unless it is also something that one *can* avoid. Generally, the truth of (1) presupposes the truth of (2):

- (1)  $\Phi$ -ing is something that I ought to avoid.
- (2) I can avoid to  $\Phi$ .<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Οὐδέποτε ἤκουσας, ὅτι τὸ αἰσχρὸν ψεκτὸν ἐστίν, τὸ δὲ ψεκτὸν ἄξιόν ἐστι τοῦ ψέγεσθαι.

<sup>22</sup> For discussion, see Margolis (1967) and, more recently, Sinnott-Armstrong (1984). If I cannot  $\Phi$ , then it is false that I ought to  $\Phi$  in the first place, unless I am responsible for my incapacity, for otherwise I could escape having to do something simply by making myself unable to do it. This is precisely what is at issue in Epictetus’ analysis of the incapacity for reflecting on impressions.

Agents who cannot avoid precipitancy would be blameless because it would not be something that they ought to avoid in the first place. In consequence, the validity of the Normative Argument requires that precipitancy be something that precipitate agents *can* avoid. As we shall now see, Epictetus offers a substantive account of how it can be avoided. He tells us in some detail how one may become, or at least make progress towards being, a reflective person. In his account of what needs to be done to become reflective Epictetus stresses that the procedure does not depend on factors that are beyond our control.<sup>23</sup>

Epictetus' therapy for treating precipitancy is chiefly a matter of weakening the disposition to react precipitately to first impressions, as the occurrence itself of first impressions is to a great extent something that is beyond our control. The therapy has its theoretical basis on an orthodox Stoic conception of dispositions (*hexeis*): they are states whose strength can be relaxed (*aniesthai*) or intensified (*epiteinesthai*) with time.<sup>24</sup> One passage dealing with intensification is D 2.18.7:

For dispositions and capacities must necessarily be affected by the corresponding actions, and become implanted if they were not present previously, or be intensified and strengthened if they were.<sup>25</sup>

Epictetus' point is not that every disposition is acquired, but rather that (i) some are and some are not (the disposition to react precipitately to first impressions presumably is), and that (ii) every disposition, whether or not it is acquired, is initially weak but subject to intensification. A disposition is intensified through its repeated activity: if the activity (*ergon*) of a disposition D is triggered off by impressions of type P, and D is triggered off by  $p_1$  at  $t_1$ , by  $p_2$  at  $t_2$ , and by  $p_3$  at  $t_3$ , the strength of D is greater at  $t_3$  than at  $t_1$ . The extreme case of the maniacs is not considered in the present passage. But they would be people in whom the disposition to react precipitately to first impressions has become so strong that, in the presence of first impressions of something as good

<sup>23</sup> In Epictetus, an activity  $\Phi$  that I plan to carry out is 'within my control' (*αὐτεξουσίος*) if there is nothing that could hinder my actually  $\Phi$ -ing. See D 1.25.2–4; 4.1.62–68; 4.7.16; 4.12.8. The latest discussion of this matter in Epictetus is Bobzien (1998), 331–8.

<sup>24</sup> For the early orthodox Stoics on this question, see Simplicius, in *Ar. cat.* 237,25–238,20 Kalbfleisch (SVF 2.393, LS 478). The verb 'being intensified' (*ἐπιτείνεται*) used in this passage is also the one used by Epictetus at D 2.18.7, which I quote below.

<sup>25</sup> Ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν καταλλήλων ἔργων μὴ καὶ τὰς ἕξεις καὶ τὰς δυνάμεις τὰς μὲν ἐμψύεσθαι μὴ πρότερον οὐσας, τὰς δ' ἐπιτείνεσθαι καὶ ἰσχυροποιεῖσθαι.

or as being the case, they cannot prevent its activity. But the idea that every disposition is initially weak—an idea that *is* stated in the present passage—suggests that *extreme* precipitation is an acquired condition. To see how maniacs could have avoided becoming extremely precipitate and how they still can become reflective, we need to examine Epictetus' views on relaxation. To do so, we may look at the beginning of the discourse (D 2.18.2):

In general, then, if you want to do something, make it a disposition; and if you want not to do something, abstain from doing it, and acquire the disposition for doing something else in its place.<sup>26</sup>

Although the term 'relaxation' is not used here, it is manifest that the passage describes the process opposite to intensification. To spell out its nature, consider again the example above. Disposition *D* becomes stronger each time it is triggered off. By  $t_3$  it has acquired a degree of strength that it did not have before. In order for it be weakened, Epictetus suggests, the agent has to acquire a disposition *D\**, opposite to *D*, and exercise *D\** *instead of* (*anti*) *D*—the idea being, presumably, that *D* will not keep its acquired strength if it remains inactive. Thus, the repeated exercise of *D\** will not only strengthen *D\**, but also weaken *D*.<sup>27</sup> If *D* has acquired a maximum degree of strength, as is the case of the maniac, then, presumably, the amount of inactivity required for it to become controllable by the agent will be considerable. But there is no suggestion anywhere in D 2.18 that a point may be reached in the evolution of a disposition that it becomes so strong that it is no longer possible for it to be therapeutically treated. The closest Epictetus comes to saying that it may become impossible to change a disposition is at D 2.18.4 and 11–12, and at the very end of the discourse, in paragraph 30. But the thesis he puts forward in these passages is not so much that it may become *impossible* to treat it, as that it might become very difficult to do so. In the former of these three passages, the disposition to assent precipitately (in the context of emotions) is compared to a weal that may become a wound. But it is not said that if it ever becomes a wound, it will no longer be possible to treat it:

<sup>26</sup> Καθόλου οὖν εἴ τι ποιεῖν ἐθέλῃς, ἐκτικὸν ποίει αὐτό: εἴ τι μὴ ποιεῖν ἐθέλῃς, μὴ ποίει αὐτό, ἀλλ' ἔθισον ἄλλο τι πράττειν μᾶλλον ἀντ' αὐτοῦ.

<sup>27</sup> At D 2.18.13, Epictetus claims that a sustained process of relaxation may end up with the destruction of the disposition. It is not clear, however, whether the disposition to react precipitately to first impressions can be totally destroyed. Even if it could, it would be destroyed only in the sage or 'philosopher'.

Something like this happens also with the affections of the mind. Certain imprints and weals are left behind on the mind, and unless a man erases them perfectly, the next time he is scourged upon the old scars, he has weals no longer but wounds. (D 2.18.11)<sup>28</sup>

Epictetus provides detailed information about how to exercise a disposition  $D^*$  instead of a disposition  $D$  that one wishes to weaken. To cause the inactivity of  $D$ , one may exercise  $D^*$  either to stop the activity of  $D$  once it has been triggered off or simply to prevent that  $D$  be triggered off. In either case, what needs to be done by the patient is a certain kind of mental exercise whose success is largely independent from factors that are beyond his control. For according to Epictetus, mental activities—acts of assent, impulses, and the beliefs that result from assent—are the paradigm of activities that are within one's control (*autexousios*). For there is nothing—not even god—that could prevent me from exercising an impulse for action or from assenting to the impression that I should perform the action.<sup>29</sup>

One therapeutic exercise designed for the former type of situations is described in paragraphs 8–9 of 2.18. They focus specifically avarice, a condition generated by the repeated occurrence of individual 'appetites for money' (*epithumiai arguriou*). How, exactly, an appetite of this kind actually comes about, Epictetus does not say. But the process presumably

<sup>28</sup> Τοιοῦτόν τι καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς παθῶν γίνεται. ἴχνη τινὰ καὶ μῶλωπες ἀπολείπονται ἐν αὐτῇ, οὓς εἰ μὴ τις ἐξαλείψῃ καλῶς, πάλιν κατὰ τῶν αὐτῶν μαστιγῶθεις οὐκέτι μῶλωπας, ἀλλ' ἔλκη ποιεῖ. Remember that in Stoic orthodox theory it is in the nature of dispositions to be subject to relaxation. See again Simplicius in *Ar. cat.* 237,25–238,20 Kalbfleisch (SVF 2.393, LS 47S).

<sup>29</sup> See especially D 1.6.40 and 4.1.62–68. For discussion, see Long (2002), 161–2. Notice, however, that the activities that are within my control are not restricted to my mental activities. For there will be cases where nothing can prevent me from actually performing an action if the action is in accordance with an impulse 'with reservation' (μεθ' ὑπεξαιρέσεως). For reservation in Epictetus, see *Enchiridion* 2 and fr. 27 Schenkl. An impulse for  $\Phi$ -ing is exercised with reservation when it is accompanied by a belief whose content includes a qualification such as 'unless  $\Phi$ -ing goes against god's providential plan'. For instance, my impulse for walking is an impulse with reservation if it is coupled with the belief that 'it is appropriate or fitting (καθῆκον) that I should walk unless my walking now is at variance with god's providential plan'. In consequence, impulses with reservation cannot be frustrated if one *knows* at any given time whether or not the action is in accordance with god's providential plan. If I know that my walking at  $t$  is in accordance god's plan, my impulse for walking cannot not frustrated at  $t$ , for nothing can interfere with the plan of the Stoic god. And if I know that my walking at  $t$  is at variance with his plan, my impulse cannot be frustrated either because I simply will not exercise the impulse at  $t$ .

involves a precipitate act of assent to the impression that I ought to  $\Phi$ , where  $\Phi$ -ing is a course of action that I regard as conducive to financial benefit. The passage deals with situations where the appetite is being exercised, which supposes that the disposition has already been triggered off and is active:

This is, of course, how philosophers say that sicknesses grow in the mind. When you once have an appetite for money, for example, if reason is applied to bring you to the perception of the evil, the appetite is brought to an end, and the governing faculty of the mind regains its original authority. (D 2.18.8)<sup>30</sup>

I assume that Epictetus is using the word ‘perception’ (*aisthēsis*) in an orthodox Stoic sense to denote an impression that has been given assent.<sup>31</sup> On this reading, what needs to be done by the agent to bring the appetite to an end (*pepautai*) is twofold. Firstly, one has to produce by the use of reason the impression that the action of  $\Phi$ -ing is bad (*kakon*) and, second, one has to assent to that impression and, thus, persuade oneself that one is aiming at something bad. This act of assent will generate an impulse for not  $\Phi$ -ing that will replace the appetite for  $\Phi$ -ing. Note that these steps are quite independent from each other. One may fail to assent to an impression that would stop the initial appetite if it *were* assented to.<sup>32</sup> This is what seems to have happened with Epictetus’ Medea. If we look at D 2.17.21, she used reason to realise that if she takes vengeance on Jason by killing her children she will also harm herself (*alla kai emautēn timôrēsomai*). So she probably did entertain the impression, produced by this reasoning, that she should not kill her children after all. If she had assented to this impression, her impulse for killing them would have been replaced by the opposite impulse. Medea, however, and as we know, did not assent to this impression.

As for the other therapeutic exercise—preventing that the disposition be triggered off—consider paragraphs 12–14 and 23–24 of 2.18. The exercise focuses on anger, which, as any other emotion, is a good example of how, in Stoic theory, the disposition to assent precipitately

<sup>30</sup> Οὕτως ἀμέλει καὶ τὰ ἀρρωστήματα ὑποφύεσθαι λέγουσιν οἱ φιλόσοφοι. ὅταν γὰρ ἅπαξ ἐπιθυμῆσιν ἀργυρίου, ἂν μὲν προσαχθῇ λόγος εἰς αἴσθησιν ἄξι[υ]ων τοῦ κακοῦ, πέπανταί τε ἡ ἐπιθυμία καὶ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν ἡμῶν εἰς τὸ ἐξαρχῆς ἀποκατέστη.

<sup>31</sup> See the evidence collected by von Arnim under SVF 2.71–81.

<sup>32</sup> My analysis of this passage coincides in many respects with that offered in Graver (2003), 353–4.

to first impressions is activated.<sup>33</sup> The therapy proposed by Epictetus consists in opposing to the first impression that yields the activity of the disposition a number of thoughts that render the first impression less attractive. This thought corresponds to an act of assent to a different impression. In contrast with what is supposed to occur in the situations that first type exercise envisages, the initial first impression is not assented to at all. The act of assent in this case corresponds to the activity of the disposition *D\** that one exercises instead of *D*.<sup>34</sup> The thought envisaged by Epictetus is that ‘I used to be angry every day, after that every other day, then every third, and then every four days’ and also, presumably, that ‘anger is bad’.

If, therefore, you do not wish to be angry, do not feed your disposition, set before it nothing on which it can grow. As the first step, keep quiet and count the days on which you have not been angry. ‘I used to be angry every day, after that every other day, then every third, and then every four days.’ If you go as much as thirty days without a fit of anger, sacrifice to God. For the disposition is first weakened and then utterly destroyed (...). If you oppose such thoughts to the impression, you will overcome it, and not be carried away by it. (D 2.18.11–14 and 23)<sup>35</sup>

The two exercises considered so far are mental; in this respect, their execution is independent from factors that are beyond our control. To conclude this section, one final remark is in order. There is a sense in which the exercises envisaged by Epictetus are *not* totally independent from factors that are beyond our control. For they all implicitly presuppose the availability of a specific kind of teacher—one who is able to instruct the precipitate agent what the exercise consists in. The performance itself of the exercises can be carried out by the precipitate agent on its own. But he cannot get started, as it were, without the help of this sort of teacher. At this initial stage, his guidance will be crucial.

<sup>33</sup> On this issue, see LS 1, 420–1: ‘A passion is a weak opinion, whereby ‘weakness’ describes the state of a ‘perverted’ reason, assenting to impressions that trigger off impulses inconsistent with a well-reasoned understanding of what their objects are worth’. For a full discussion of the evidence, see Gill (1996), 228–31 and Sorabji (2000), 29–33.

<sup>34</sup> On the structure of this particular exercise, see Long (1991), 115.

<sup>35</sup> Εἰ οὖν θέλεις μὴ εἶναι ὀργίλος, μὴ τρέφε σου τὴν ἔξιν, μηδὲν αὐτῇ παρὰβαλλε αὐξητικόν. τὴν πρώτην ἡσύχασον καὶ τὰς ἡμέρας ἀρίθμει ἅς οὐκ ὀργίσθης. ‘καθ’ ἡμέραν εἰώθειν ὀργίζεσθαι, νῦν παρ’ ἡμέραν, εἴτα παρὰ δύο, εἴτα παρὰ τρεῖς.’ ἂν δὲ καὶ τριάκοντα παραλίπῃς, ἐπίθυσον τῷ θεῷ. ἡ γὰρ ἔξις ἐκλύεται τὴν πρώτην, εἴτα καὶ παντελῶς ἀναιρεῖται (...) ταῦτα ἀντιθεῖς νικήσεις τὴν φαντασίαν, οὐχ ἐλκυσθήσῃ ὑπ’ αὐτῆς.

This is relevant for the Normative Argument. For the argument presupposes that only those precipitate agents who can become reflective are blameworthy for their precipitancy. But if the availability of a proper teacher is necessary, does not it follow that only *very* few precipitate agents are blameworthy for their precipitancy? In particular, does not it follow that precipitate agents cannot be blamed for their precipitancy if they have not had the opportunity to benefit from a teacher trained in Epictetus' school and who knows the specific kind of exercises he envisages for treating precipitancy—an opportunity that is arguably something beyond their control? This would introduce a severe restriction to the scope of the Normative Argument. This is not the place to deal with this issue in detail. But I have argued elsewhere that Epictetus' own answer to these questions would be in the negative.<sup>36</sup> Although there may be cases of people who genuinely cannot become reflective, these cases are rare and do not pose a threat to the ascription of responsibility to most precipitate agents.

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<sup>36</sup> See Salles (2005), chapter 6, where I present a fuller analysis of Epictetus' Normative Argument.





PLOTINUS ON *AKRASIA*:  
THE NEOPLATONIC SYNTHESIS\*

LLOYD GERSON

Porphyry tells us that ‘mixed in’ with Plotinus’s *Enneads* are ‘concealed Stoic and Peripatetic teachings’.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere is this more apparent than in his understanding of moral psychology, broadly speaking. At the same time, Plotinus thought of himself as an unwavering adherent of Platonism, certainly more a ‘paleo-Platonist’ than a ‘neo-Platonist.’ It is misleading to suggest that this Platonism is a type of syncretism, which I understand to be the view that an amalgam of philosophical positions is thought to result in something new. Rather, it is an application of the principle that Aristotle’s philosophy and, at least in psychological and ethical matters, Stoic philosophy, were in harmony with Platonism. This is the position that Hierocles of Alexandria attributes to Plotinus’s teacher, Ammonius Saccas.<sup>2</sup> The claim that with regard to an account of *akrasia* Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics are in harmony is bound to appear dubious. For Aristotle seems to consciously develop his account in opposition to Plato; and at least for the Old Stoa, weakness of will seems to be ruled out by the account of the actions of rational creatures. Accordingly, I begin with a brief survey of what I believe Plotinus took to be the received wisdom of the three great schools that preceded his own. I then turn to Plotinus’s synthesis of this material.

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<sup>1</sup> *Life of Plotinus* 1.4.

<sup>2</sup> Photius, *Bibliotheca* 214.2 (172a2–9); Porphyry, *De Regressu Animae* fr. 302F, 6 Smith.

1. *Plotinus's Predecessors*1.1. *Plato*

In *Protagoras*, Plato has Socrates argue *against* the possibility of *akrasia*.<sup>3</sup> Socrates argues against the many that which is commonly called 'being overcome by pleasure though one knows the right thing to' is in fact 'ignorance' (*amathia*).<sup>4</sup> The basic argument is as follows: (1) Assume, with those who believe that being overcome by pleasure is a fact of life, that someone chooses X over Y knowing that Y is better but being overcome by the pleasurable of X (353a5–b2); (2) 'Pleasurable' and 'good' are two names for the same thing (353b3–c1); (3) So, then, someone chooses X over Y, knowing that Y is better because he is overcome by the goodness of X (355c3–8). This conclusion is taken to be absurd and therefore to reveal the falsity of (1) (355d1–3). That is, assuming that 'pleasure' and 'good' mean the same thing, it makes no sense to say that someone does what he knows to be not good because he is overcome by pleasure.

Plato and Aristotle both came to believe that on the model of action assumed in this argument, *akrasia* is impossible. This model holds that persons are rational agents, that is, that reasons are the immediate causes of action, where action includes refraining from acting. In addition, it holds that the reasoning that causes action is a unified or coherent process, that is, if the reason for doing something is a belief that p, then one cannot simultaneously believe that not-p. Alternatively, we might put this by saying that the only reasons for acting are effective beliefs, beliefs that, all things considered, doing something is the way to achieve one's good insofar as one understands that. If I believe that in this instance refraining from doing something is good for me, I cannot be overcome in the relevant sense, for being overcome implies that the action springs from a belief that contradicts what I believe is good for me. If I do act, it is because I have an effective belief that, all things considered, this is the way to achieve my good.<sup>5</sup> Such action may be ill-informed or vicious, or even self-destructive, but it is not acritic.

<sup>3</sup> *Protagoras* 352a 1–c7.

<sup>4</sup> 357d1 provides the correct name for what at 352e 8–353a 2 is described as 'being overcome by pleasure'.

<sup>5</sup> An 'effective belief' is close to what is indicated by Plato in his claim that 'no one does wrong willingly'. See *Apology* 37a5; *Gorgias* 488a3; *Protagoras* 345d8, 358c7; *Republic* 589c6; *Timaeus* 86d7–c1; *Laws* 731c–d. An action done 'willingly' (*hekôn*) is one done on the basis of a belief that such an action will achieve one's own good. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III 3, 1113a2–7.

The recognition of the possibility of *akrasia* by Plato demanded a new model of action. The possibility is acknowledged in *Republic* with the pathetic Leontius who yearns to gaze upon the naked corpses despite his belief that he ought not do so.<sup>6</sup> The new model of action is based upon the hypothesis of a partitioned soul. This new model seeks to provide the grounds for maintaining that the explanation for an action, the *archê* of the action, can be other than reason. In the case of Leontius, the *archê* is his desire to satisfy his lurid appetite. This desire is resisted by his belief that it is wrong to seek such satisfaction.

How does partitioning of the soul permit us to say that someone acted against his own belief regarding what is best for him in the situation? As I have argued elsewhere, partitioning of the soul is partitioning of an embodied self or person.<sup>7</sup> This amounts to the recognition of an essential recursiveness or reflexivity in embodied rational desire. Beings capable of reason or *logos* have, normally, desires and desires in regard to these desires. One can, following Harry Frankfurt, call these first and second-order desires if one likes, though Frankfurt himself eschews any interest in the metaphysics of personhood.<sup>8</sup> For Plato, this capacity is an example of the equivocal ontological status of all that is embodied.<sup>9</sup> Leaving the metaphysics aside for the moment, what this means is that embodied persons can be simultaneously the subject of one desire and the subject of the desire to have the first desire not be an effective cause of action. This hypothesis about personhood alone—whatever the explanation of the fact that the first desire prevailed—accounts for the possibility of *akrasia*. The nature of embodied personhood is such that I can want to do something and simultaneously want not to do that identical thing. For Plato, no contradiction follows upon such a hypothesis because the subject of each desire is not unequivocally the same. In the case of Leontius, the subject of the desire to gaze upon the corpses is not unequivocally the same as the subject of the desire to refrain, though these are not unequivocally *different* subjects either. Leontius has a (second-order) desire that arises from a criticism of his own (first-order) desire, so there is no question that he is unequivocally two subjects; on the other hand, insofar as the identity or individuation

<sup>6</sup> *Republic* 439e6–440a3.

<sup>7</sup> See Gerson (2003), ch. 3.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Frankfurt (1971). For a sympathetic yet critical analysis of Frankfurt's distinction see Stump (1996).

<sup>9</sup> In *Timaeus* 35a–b, the soul is 'constructed' out of both divisible and indivisible *ousia*, reflecting the fact that we stand between mere images and that which is really real.

of a subject is constituted by, among other things, its desires, he also cannot be unequivocally one subject.

It is important to realize that both the first and second-order desires are rational in the sense that both are conceptualized by the subject. The so-called 'quarrel between reason and appetite' that is supposed to entail the attribution of reason *to* appetite or to an appetitive faculty is in fact no such thing.<sup>10</sup> Reason does not argue with a 'rationalized' appetite, whatever that is supposed to mean. There is also no need to posit a *homunculus* representing the appetite in the quarrel. The acratia event occurs *after* practical reasoning has occurred. If this were not the case, then the action taken as a result of the putative quarrel would not be acratia; it would be action resulting from the 'all-things-considered' judgment of how one's good is to be achieved.

Leontius is faced with his belief that his good is achieved by satisfying his first-order desire to gaze and his belief that his good is achieved by satisfying his second-order desire to refrain from gazing. Leontius's dilemma is that he is insecure in his identity. He does not know whether acting or refraining from acting is his real good because he does not know whether he is really a subject of the first or the second-order desire. His confusion is understandable since *both* his first and second-order desires are rational in the relevant sense, that is, they are conceptualized.<sup>11</sup> Why after all *should* Leontius prefer to act on his second-order desire rather than on his first-order desire? For Plato, the only possible reason for choosing to act on one desire rather than another is that at the moment of action or in general Leontius is sufficiently alienated from one self-conception and sufficiently identified with another that *his* good appears to him only as the object of the desire of the latter. The idea of 'alienation' from one's own desire can be given a fairly perspicuous sense if we consider that the ultimate form of such alienation is when the desire is recognized by the subject

<sup>10</sup> See for the view that appetite is somehow capable of engaging in reasoning Moline (1981), 61. See also Annas (1999), 133–6; Fortenbaugh (1975), 38–44; Lesses (1987); Kahn (1987), 77–103, 85; Bobonich (1994), 4, n. 3, with references, and 12; Irwin (1995), 217–22; Gill (1996), 243–60; Scott (2000), 30–32.

<sup>11</sup> *Republic* 437c7–8: 'Each and every desire, in itself, is a desire only for the thing which is its natural object. The addition in each case is what makes it a desire for this or that particular kind of object' (αὐτὴ γὰρ ἡ ἐπιθυμία ἐκάστη αὐτοῦ μόνον ἐκάστου οὐ πέφυκεν, τοῦ δὲ τοίου ἢ τοίου τὰ προσγιγνώμενα). These 'additions' include, minimally, conceptualization of a particular type of object of desire, e.g., lemonade, as opposed simply to drink. Since all desire is for the good, the conceptualization of the object is conceptualization of it as a good, e.g., lemonade is good for me now.

as being like the desire of another person.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, the ‘identification’ with the subject of a desire is the other extreme, whose ultimate achievement would occur if one *only* located one’s good in the object of such a desire.<sup>13</sup> In such a person, there would be a coincidence of first and second-order desires.

The subject of second-order desires is specifically the ‘man within the man’ Plato refers to in *Republic* 589a7–8. His desires are also rational in a way that the first-order desires are not: they do not belong to a subject with which he is not really or ideally identical. That is, they do not belong to a subject of bodily appetites. This ideal subject is unquestionably a disembodied one for Plato; embodiment always entails at least a residual attachment to the subject of bodily appetites.

According to Plato, ‘giving in’ to one’s own appetites amounts to a false belief that one’s identity is located as the subject of these appetites. Because there is a belief here, albeit a false one, there is rationality; because one has ‘given in’ to the nonrational appetite, we can say that the *archê* of the action is other than reason. Alternately, we can say that the *archê* of action is against ‘right reason’.<sup>14</sup> Those who think that Plato has mistakenly forsworn the account of *Protagoras* by allowing the nonrational a part in the account of action do not, I believe, sufficiently acknowledge the ambiguity of the subject as rational and as image of the rational.<sup>15</sup> Identifying oneself as the latter is manifestly both a rational act and an abnegation of rational identity.

## 1.2. *Aristotle*

Turning to Aristotle, I begin with the perhaps surprising fact that Aristotle’s account of *akrasia* rests upon the same doctrine as Plato’s, namely, a distinction between the ideal ‘man within the man’ and the embodied person or, in Aristotle’s terminology, the ‘composite’ organic *anthrôpos*. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10, chapters 6–8, Aristotle distinguishes ‘that which we are especially’ from the composite.<sup>16</sup> The former is intellect; the latter is the subject of embodied psychical states.

<sup>12</sup> One may compare the extreme case of the psychotic who does not recognize himself as being identical with the individual who committed the crime.

<sup>13</sup> *Republic* 443e1; 554d9–10.

<sup>14</sup> See for *orthos logos* in this sense *Statesman* 310c4; *Laws* 696c9.

<sup>15</sup> See especially Penner (1990, 1996 and 1997).

<sup>16</sup> *NE* X 7, 1178a7: Τοῦτο [ὁ νοῦς] μάλιστα ἀνθρώπος. Cf. *NE* X 7, 1177a12–19; X 7, 1097a25–b21; X 5, 1175b36–1176a29; X 8, 1178a9–22; b3–7.

Intellect, as in Plato, is immortal whereas the soul/body composite is not.<sup>17</sup> The relationship between intellect and soul is in Aristotle a vexed topic, especially in regard to cognitive matters. Nevertheless, it is with the distinction between the soul/body composite and the *real* person that we must approach Aristotle's account of incontinence.

Second, Aristotle, like Plato, distinguishes between the part of the soul that 'has reason' and the part that, though it is nonrational, can 'obey' reason.<sup>18</sup> This is 'the appetitive part' (*to epithumêtikon*) of the soul.<sup>19</sup> Aristotle allows, however, that obeying reason requires 'reason-involvement' of some sort, that is, the conceptualization of desire.<sup>20</sup> As in Plato, the subject of the incontinent person's desire is the same as the subject of the desire to refrain from acting. There is no need for *homunculi* here either. But Aristotle will not allow for embodied psychic dividedness, despite his acknowledgment of the distinction between the man and the 'man within the man.' Instead, he accounts for incontinence by distinguishing senses of 'knowing' and 'believing.'

Basically, the Aristotelian acratice acts on a syllogism the major premise of which is a general statement indicating the general desirability of the satisfaction of an appetite. And though there must also be in the acratice a belief in a universal premise stating the *undesirability* of that appetite's satisfaction, the acratice acts according to the former, not the latter. He acts according to the universal premise, though his belief in the particular premise is, as Aristotle says, authoritative over the action.<sup>21</sup> But in order to avoid the paradox of saying that the acratice has contradictory beliefs, he says that it is the desire that contradicts reason, not belief.<sup>22</sup>

Aristotle seems to differ from Plato in maintaining that if there is occurrent knowledge in an agent indicating that he ought to refrain

<sup>17</sup> For the immortality of intellect see *De Anima* III 5, 430a23. Cf. I 4, 408b18–19.

<sup>18</sup> *NE* I 7, 1098a4; I 13, 1102a27–1103a3.

<sup>19</sup> *NE* I 13, 1102b30.

<sup>20</sup> *NE* I 13, 1103a1–3. It is clear from the characterization of the incontinent man at VII 3, 1147a 32–b 3 that desire is conceptualized in order that he can be represented as syllogizing.

<sup>21</sup> *NE* VII 3, 1147b9–10.

<sup>22</sup> *NE* VII 3, 1147b2–3. Donald Davidson (1970) gives an analysis of *akrasia* that is essentially Aristotelian in form. Davidson thinks that the acratice acts against his 'all-things-considered' judgment and in accord with his 'unconditional' judgment of what he desires. I take it that this unconditional judgment arises from a desire that is unincorporated into the all-things-considered judgment.

from acting, then he will not—or cannot—act.<sup>23</sup> Would Aristotle say then that Leontius could not know or truly believe that gazing on the corpses was bad for him? Not exactly. What Leontius could not have is ‘knowledge in the principal sense’ (*kuriōs epistēmē*). He *could* have knowledge, but only in the way a drunkard or a madman has it. The distinction between knowledge (or belief) and ‘knowledge in the principal sense’ indicates the a priori nature of the claim. The only way to tell what sort of knowledge Leontius has is by his report after the fact that he indeed had knowledge. If, however, he acted against this knowledge, then it is stipulated that he did not *really* have knowledge. What is the supposed difference between knowledge and knowledge in the principal sense? As Aristotle describes it, the difference is that in the former case there is a disconnect between belief in the universal proposition and belief that it applies to oneself or to oneself now.

This disconnect may occur for two different reasons: ‘impetuosity’ (*propeteia*) and ‘weakness’ (*astheneia*). In the first case, one of the particular premises in the practical syllogism is not applied; in the second case, the conclusion of the syllogism is rendered ineffective.<sup>24</sup> In either case, there is a failure to actualize fully the knowledge of the universal proposition, which evidently means a failure to embrace either the obvious fact that the particular falling under the universal is before one or to embrace the conclusion of the syllogism.<sup>25</sup>

All the explanatory content here is supposed by Aristotle to fall upon the ‘failure to embrace.’ But the analogy with the drunkard or the madman is opaque, for the problem is precisely that the akratic is neither drunk nor mad. To say that he fails to embrace or assent to the truth of what is before his eyes or to the truth of the conclusion of his own reasoning owing to ‘physiological’ reasons is either to claim implicitly that incontinence *is* drunkenness or madness or it is to offer no explanation at all. In the former alternative, we undercut the culpability of the akratic; in the latter, we merely point to a psychological cause supposedly analogous to the putative physiological one.

Leontius could acknowledge that corpse-gazing was bad, but that it was not bad for him here and now. What Leontius believes is that

<sup>23</sup> *NE* VII 3, 1147b15–19.

<sup>24</sup> *NE* VII 3, 1147a4–10; 1147a24–b1; cf. VII 7, 1150b19–23.

<sup>25</sup> Kenny (1979), 160–6, argues that just because the verbal criterion for the acceptance of the universal premise is different from the behavioral criterion for the acceptance of the particular, Aristotle does in fact explain incontinence.

in his present circumstance he is an exception to the rule, or, stated otherwise, his good now, all things considered, is achieved by gazing. Even if he were to agree that it is wrong *for him* to gaze now, he still believes that, all things considered, his good is achieved now by gazing. Knowledge in the principal sense for Aristotle does not differ from any other knowledge by content, but by its being authoritative in action. And since all agents act to achieve a good, such knowledge is not authoritative when the agent conceives of his good otherwise, that is, in this case, by the satisfaction of an appetite to gaze.

In the light of Aristotle's explicit distinction between the human being and 'what we really are,' that is, intellects, his account of how *akrasia* is possible does not seem really to differ significantly from Plato's. It is perhaps Aristotle's denial in *De Anima* that 'the soul thinks with one part and desires with another' that leads one to suppose that he is taking a different line.<sup>26</sup> Plato, though, like Aristotle, needs to have the subject of desire be the same as the subject of thought. *Akrasia* for both Plato and Aristotle indicates confusion about self-identity. Such confusion is contrary to the fixity of character present both in the virtuous and in the vicious man.

### 1.3. *Stoicism*

There is a consensus among contemporary scholars that the Old Stoa rejected both the Platonic and Aristotelian explanations of *akrasia* and reverted to the 'Socratic' position of *Protagoras*.<sup>27</sup> Part of the scanty evidence for this view is that the Middle Stoa, particularly Posidonius, seems to counter this position by positing some sort of division within the soul.<sup>28</sup> I am not convinced, however, that, viewed from the perspective of issues of identity, the position of the Old Stoa really does constitute a rejection of the phenomenon of *akrasia* as opposed to a variation on its explanation.<sup>29</sup> This variation embraces the rationality of desire or

<sup>26</sup> *De Anima* I 5, 411b5–6. But cf. *NE* IX 8, 1168b34–35.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Inwood (1985), 132–9.

<sup>28</sup> Galen, *De Placitis Hippocrates et Platonis*, V, 7, 3 (= Posidonius. *The Fragments*. V.1, ed. Edelstein and Kidd, fr. 143) says that Posidonius agrees with Plato and Aristotle.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Chrysippus' view, as recounted by Galen, *De Placitis Hippocrates et Platonis* (= *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* [SVF] III § 476): 'That is why it is not off the mark to say, as some people do, that a passion of the soul is an unnatural motion, as is the case with fear and desire and things like that. For all such motions and conditions are disobedient to reason and reject it... That is what such conditions are like, uncontrolled, as though they were not masters of themselves but were carried away like those who



impulse on behalf of a unitary concept of the soul. The actions of the putative acratia, for Chrysippus, originate in ‘excessive impulse’ (*hormé pleonazousa*) which is itself or originates in ‘assent’ (*sugkatathesis*), that is, assent to presentations contrary to the deliverances of right reason.<sup>30</sup> It is supposed by Galen and Posidonius, among others, that the mental conflicts from which acratia action ensues is inconsistent with a monistic psychology. This would be true if this psychology precluded the sort of conflict between first and second-order reasons, that is, the sort of conflict I interpret Plato and Aristotle to endorse. But it does not.<sup>31</sup> The question is rather as to the status of one’s identification with the deliverances of second-order reasons. For the Old Stoa, this identification is as much an ideal one as it is for their two great predecessors. All non-sages are fools because they do not identify their own good with the will of Zeus or they do identify it as such but only in a way that does not constitute genuine assent.

The distinction between a dualistic and a monistic psychology a propos an account of *akrasia* is, I believe, something of a red herring. This is because the actions of creatures capable of *akrasia* are *essentially* dualistic *and* monistic in the relevant senses. That is, the agent who formulates the desire to act on appetite in despite of his own reason must be capable of the dualism of first and second-order desires and also must be the selfsame subject of both. What, if anything, separates the three accounts of *akrasia* I have hitherto mentioned is a difference more in emphasis than anything else in regard to the way to understand the endowment and the ideal achievement of personhood.

The specific Stoic contribution to the understanding of *akrasia* is to minimize the difference between it and vice as well as the difference between *enkrateia* or continence and virtue.<sup>32</sup> This minimizing is implied

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run strenuously and are swept away and cannot control their motion’ (Διὸ καὶ οὐκ ἄπο τρόπου λέγεται ὑπὸ τινων τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς πάθος εἶναι κινήσεις παρὰ φύσιν, ὡς ἐπὶ φόβου ἔχει καὶ ἐπιθυμίας καὶ τῶν ὁμοίων. πᾶσαι γὰρ αἱ τοιαῦται κινήσεις τε καὶ καταστάσεις ἀπειθεῖς τε τῷ λόγῳ εἰσὶ καὶ ἀπεστραμμέναι (...) οἳ καὶ ἀκρατεῖς αἱ τοιαῦται καταστάσεις εἰσὶν, ὡς ἂν οὐ κρατοῦντων ἑαυτῶν, ἀλλ’ ἐκφερομένων καθάπερ οἱ τῷ τόνῳ τρέχοντες προσεκφέρονται οὐ κρατοῦντες τῆς τοιαύτης κινήσεως).

<sup>30</sup> See Galen, *De Placitis Hippocrates et Platonis* (= SVF III § 473, § 478); Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinion of Eminent Philosophers* VII, 110.

<sup>31</sup> See Inwood (1985), 163. See also the interesting discussion in Long (1996), 275–85, on Epictetus’s efforts to deny the phenomenon of *akrasia* at the same time as he acknowledges mental conflict.

<sup>32</sup> Stobaeus, *Eclogues* II 60, 9 Wachsmuth (= SVF III § 264), where *enkrateia* is listed as a virtue, specifically, one type of *sôphrosunê*. The elision of *akrasia* and vice comes out

by the analysis of *akrasia* as rooted in a failure to identify one's own good as exclusively rational or, in Stoic language, as given by 'right reason.' Absent this identification, one could not unequivocally assent to its deliverances as applying to oneself. Hence, the difference between *akrasia* and vice becomes exiguous.<sup>33</sup> The akratic's notional commitment to right reason could not constitute assent.

Another facet of the Stoic contribution is the formulation of an account of assent which makes of it a nascent concept of the will.<sup>34</sup> This is another story, to be sure, one which cannot be told adequately here. Chrysippus can maintain that 'impulse in man is reason prescriptive of action for him'.<sup>35</sup> Such reason is equivalent to the universal premise in a practical syllogism, so long as we acknowledge that everyone desires their own good. The assent to the proposition that initiates action is assent to a statement of the specification of the good for oneself now.

As we turn to Plotinus, and what I have termed 'the Neoplatonic synthesis,' we shall see, I think, how all these strands come together.

## 2. Plotinus's *Neoplatonic Synthesis*

The reasons for thinking that Plotinus wished to be considered a 'paleo-Platonist' rather than a 'neo-Platonist' do not need to be rehearsed here. It should be added, however, that Plotinus was more than willing to appropriate Aristotelian and Stoic insights into what Proclus praised as Plotinus's

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simply as 'weakness in the soul' in Chrysippus. See e.g., Galen, *De Placitis Hippocrates et Platonis* (= SVF III § 473). This weakness or *astheneia* is neither ignorance nor incompetence. See Stobaeus, *Eclogues* II 58, 5 Wachsmuth (= SVF III § 95). Vice is called a weakness in the soul by Plato. See *Gorgias* 477b 3–4; *Republic* 444e1. Note that the type of *akrasia* said by Aristotle to be owing to 'impetuosity' is dropped.

<sup>33</sup> Similarly for the distinction between *akrasia* and compulsion. The latter, like *akrasia*, consists in acting against one's judgment of what is best for oneself. But the desire upon which one does act is thought to be irresistible. The idea of an irresistible desire is not easily distinguished from a desire that was not, at the time, resisted. There is, it seems, no way to establish the falsity of the counterfactual claim that if one had only tried harder, one could have resisted the desire. If one could do this, then one could distinguish those cases in which the desire was not resisted, though it could have been. These latter cases are cases of *akrasia*.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Taylor (1989), 137, on the Stoic contribution. Also, Sorabji (2000), 42–4; 319–40, who disputes the idea that the Stoics had a 'full blooded' concept of the will.

<sup>35</sup> See Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1037F (= SVF III § 175): 'And, indeed, impulse [according to Chrysippus] is the reason of man commanding him to act...' (Καὶ μὴν ἡ ὁρμή [according to Chrysippus] (...) τοῦ ἀνθρώπου λόγος ἐστὶ προστακτικὸς αὐτῷ τοῦ ποιεῖν).

‘exegesis of the Platonic revelation’.<sup>36</sup> I assume that he was deeply impressed by the convergence of Aristotelians and Stoics with Platonism on the bipolarity of identity as endowment and achievement. Plotinus asserts: ‘Each of us is double: one being the composite and one being the self’.<sup>37</sup>

But the self, we are told, is the soul, whereas the composite is the soul plus the body.<sup>38</sup> This seems puzzling at first, since the soul appears to be ‘counted’ twice. In fact, each person is the composite insofar as he acts on desires originating in the composite; he is his self when he acts on or identifies with his reason.<sup>39</sup> The claim that the composite is ‘me’ but not the *real* or *true* ‘me’ captures this duality exactly.<sup>40</sup> Frankfurt’s distinction between first and second-order desires expresses the psychological continuity between the two. In the Plotinian context, a person’s first-order desire aims at a good of the composite. It is always a rational desire in the sense that it must be conceptualized as a good. If it could not be conceptualized as such, it could not be resisted or suppressed. But a first-order desire is *not* rational in the way that a second-order desire is rational. The latter includes nothing of the idiosyncratic or the particular. The manifest psychological continuity between the two consists in our ability to bring our theoretical reasoning to bear on our practical reasoning about actions related to our first-order desires. The very possibility that I could desire not to possess a desire or not to have that desire be the effective source of action constitutes, for Plotinus at any rate, the irreducible duality of the embodied person.<sup>41</sup>

A person must be able variously to identify himself as the subject of each type of desire. The plight of every such person concerns the choice of desires or the choice of self-identification. But it is the specific cause of the first-order desire that is the focal point of weakness. The cause is always a bodily state or *pathos* such as sensations or feelings of pleasure and pain or emotions.<sup>42</sup> The desires elicited by these states are either voluntary or ‘involuntary’ (*aproaireton*). An involuntary desire is

<sup>36</sup> Proclus, *Platonic Theology* I 6, 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Enneads* II 3.9, 30–31: Διττὸς γὰρ ἕκαστος, ὁ μὲν τὸ συναμφοτέρον τι, ὁ δὲ αὐτός; cf. IV 4.18, 14–19.

<sup>38</sup> IV 7.1, 24–25. Cf. Plato, *Alcibiades* I, 130c.

<sup>39</sup> I 1.9, 15–18.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. IV 4.18, 11–16. Cf. Plato, *Laws* 959a4–b 7, who identifies the true self with what remains after the death of the composite. That this is a rational entity alone seems to follow from *Timaeus* 90b1–d 7.

<sup>41</sup> VI 8.2, 35–37 on the ‘mixed’ nature of the actions of embodied persons.

<sup>42</sup> By ‘bodily states’ I mean states of the embodied soul for which the possession of a body is necessary.

one which has not been endorsed by a second-order desire; a voluntary desire is one which has.<sup>43</sup> For example, someone who conceptualizes a desire for the elimination of a pain by an illicit pleasure is acting on an involuntary desire. The ideal state of the embodied person—the state arising from purificatory virtue—is one in which there is no involuntary desire at all.<sup>44</sup> This is the way Plotinus describes this state:

But will we say that he has this perfect type of life in himself as a part of himself? In fact, one who has it in potency has it as a part, whereas the one who is at once happy is the one who is this actually and has transformed himself in the direction of being identical with this. Everything else is something he is carrying around at the same time, which no one would suppose to be a part of him, since he does not want to carry these things around. They would be parts of him if they were connected to him according to his will (*kata boulêsin*). (I 4.4, 11–17)<sup>45</sup>

The last sentence needs to be understood as indicating the person who endorses or wills the first-order desires arising from embodiment. By contrast, one who identifies exclusively with his second-order intellectual desires has, as Plotinus says, transformed himself, that is, he has embraced his identity as an intellect. In Plato's language, he has 'become one out of many'.<sup>46</sup>

The terrain on which any distinction between vice and incontinence can be made is to be found among those who more or less connect their first-order desires with themselves 'according to their will'. That is, they identify themselves more or less as subjects of involuntary desires. Like the Stoics, Plotinus believes that the distinction between those who make no such identification and those who do is far more significant than any distinction among the latter.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See especially I 2.5. A voluntary desire is also called by Plotinus 'natural.' See *ibid.*, line 19.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 64d3–6 and Aristotle, *NE* VII 3, 1147b23–31 on 'necessary pleasures.' The concept of *ta aproaireta* is especially prominent in the Roman Stoa. It refers primarily to things outside of the control of our will or moral purpose. See, e.g., Epictetus, *Discourses*, I 18, 21; I 29, 24; III 16, 15. But Epictetus, IV 1, 84, also distinguishes the desires for things within our control and the desires for things that are not. The latter would be involuntary desires. Plotinus certainly had a knowledge of Epictetus' *Discourses*.

<sup>45</sup> Ἄλλ' ὡς μέρος αὐτοῦ τοῦτο φήσομεν ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ εἶδος τῆς ζωῆς τὸ τέλειον εἶναι; Ἡ τὸν μὲν ἄλλον ἄνθρωπον μέρος τι τοῦτο ἔχειν δυνάμει ἔχοντα, τὸν δὲ εὐδαιμόνα ἤδη, ὃς δὴ καὶ ἐνεργεῖα ἐστὶ τοῦτο καὶ μεταβέβηκε πρὸς τὸ αὐτό, εἶναι τοῦτο· περικεῖσθαι δ' αὐτῷ τὰ ἄλλα ἤδη, ἃ δὴ οὐδὲ μέρη αὐτοῦ ἂν τις θεῖτο οὐκ ἐθέλοντι περικείμενα· ἦν δ' ἂν αὐτοῦ κατὰ βούλησιν συνηρημένα.

<sup>46</sup> *Republic* 443c1; 554d9–10; *Phaedo* 83a7.

<sup>47</sup> See above n. 33. Though all wrongdoing arises from involuntary desires, we may wonder if there is a distinction between resistible and irresistible involuntary desires.

For this reason, we are concerned with its [i.e., the body's] pleasures and pains, the more concerned the weaker we are, and to the extent that we do not separate ourselves, but posit it as the most honorable part of us and the human being and sink ourselves into it. (IV 4.18, 15–19)<sup>48</sup>

Our weakness consists in transforming states of embodied life into involuntary desires. It is odd that they should be called 'involuntary'. The central idea is that the state causes the desire involuntarily, provided one has identified oneself with the subject of the state. The desire will be as spontaneous or automatic as is the state. The idea that we can control such involuntary desires and even eliminate them depends upon our primary identification with that which is essentially alien to this subject. An involuntary desire is only involuntary if we accept our embodied state. Plotinus is abundantly clear that the cause of the soul's weakness is matter.

This is the fall of the soul, to come in this way to matter and to become weak, because all of its powers are not activated; matter prevents their presence by occupying the place that soul holds and in a way by making its condition constricted and by making evil what it got hold of by a sort of theft, until soul is able to escape. Matter is thus the cause of weakness in the soul and the cause of evil. (I 8.14, 44–50)<sup>49</sup>

Plotinus's complex and subtle account of matter deserves far more attention that can be here given.<sup>50</sup> What is paramount for our purposes is that matter is distinct from body, that it is identified with privation and evil.<sup>51</sup> It is thus *via* embodiment that we acquire the weakness in the soul that makes us susceptible to evil.

First-order desires arise out of our concern for the composite, hence concern for that which is inseparable from evil.<sup>52</sup> But because the

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Even if such a distinction could be made, the main motive for making it seems to be evaluative, that is, for purposes of assigning blame or responsibility. But this sort of approach to moral matters is not central for Plotinus.

<sup>48</sup> Διὸ καὶ ἡδομένου καὶ ἀλγοῦντος μέλει, καὶ ὅσῳ ἀσθενέστεροι μᾶλλον, καὶ ὅσῳ ἑαυτοὺς μὴ χωρίζομεν, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἡμῶν τὸ τιμιώτατον καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον τιθέμεθα καὶ οἷον εἰσδύομεθα εἰς αὐτό. The soul-body composite is the human being, but not the true human being or self.

<sup>49</sup> Καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ πῶμα τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ οὕτως ἐλθεῖν εἰς ὕλην καὶ ἀσθενεῖν, ὅτι πᾶσαι αἱ δυνάμεις οὐ πάρεσιν εἰς ἐνέργειαν κωλυούσης ὕλης παρῆναι τῷ τὸν τόπον ὃν κατέχει αὐτὴ καταλαβεῖν καὶ οἷον συσπειραθῆναι ποιῆσαι ἐκείνην, ὃ δ' ἔλαβεν οἷον κλέψασα ποιῆσαι κακὸν εἶναι, ἕως ἂν δυνηθῇ ἀναδραμεῖν. Ὑλῃ τοῖνον καὶ ἀσθενεΐας ψυχῇ αἰτία καὶ κακίας αἰτία.

<sup>50</sup> See O'Brien (1991) and (1996).

<sup>51</sup> On matter as bodiless see II 4.8, 2; II 4.9, 5; II 4.12, 35. On matter as privation see II 4.16, 3–8; I 8.5, 6–13; I 8.11, 1–7. On matter as evil see I 8.7, 1–4; I 8.7, 17–23.

<sup>52</sup> I 8.15.

composite or body is not itself evil but a mixture of matter and form (evil and good), bad first-order desires, that is, involuntary ones, are only secondarily evil.<sup>53</sup> Since desire is, unqualifiedly, for the Good, even bad desires reflect good ones. The appetites or *epithumiai* that are, for both Plato and Aristotle, the locus of acts of incontinence, have enough goodness in them, so that even those who identify them as their own and act on them are implicitly acknowledging their basic orientation to the Good. The desire towards ‘intellect’ (*nous*), or second-order desire, is, by contrast, different; it is uncontaminated with evil.<sup>54</sup>

### 3. Akrasia and Freedom

In order to fill out the picture of Plotinus’s account of *akrasia*, we need to consider his analysis of freedom or, as he puts it, what is ‘up to us’. This analysis is best viewed as a commentary on Plato’s claim that ‘no one does wrong willingly’.<sup>55</sup> Literally, this claim comes close to being an analytic truth. The verb *hamartanein* (‘to err’) indicates a failed effort to achieve an explicit goal. *Of course*, no one willingly fails to achieve that which they *aim* to achieve. Combined with the premise that everyone aims at their own good, the non-paradoxical conclusion is reached that no one willingly fails to achieve their own good as they conceive of it. The *paradoxical* conclusion that no one willingly does what is *simpliciter* wrong is reached via the additional premise that there is an identity between what is wrong or bad *simpliciter* and what is wrong or bad for oneself. Thus, wrongdoing is caused by ignorance, specifically ignorance of this identity.<sup>56</sup>

How is this ignorance to be remedied? The simple answer might seem to be: by acquiring knowledge of that which is good or of goods, such as virtue. But it is precisely the existence of the incontinent individual that indicates the inadequacy of this response. For such a person can know what is good and also know that what is good is good for him

<sup>53</sup> I 8.8, 41–44.

<sup>54</sup> I 8.15, 21–23.

<sup>55</sup> That no one does wrong willingly is held consistently by Plato. See *Apology* 37a5; *Protagoras* 345d8, 358c7; *Gorgias* 488a3; *Republic* 589c6; *Timaeus* 85d2, e1; *Laws* 731c–d. It should be emphasized that Plato held that no one does wrong willingly both when he held that *akrasia* is impossible and when he held that *akrasia* is possible if the soul is tripartite.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Plato, *Alcibiades* I, 118a–b; *Protagoras* 360b7; *Theaetetus* 176c5; *Philebus* 22b6–8; *Laws* 863c1; Plotinus, I 8.8, 41.

and *still* do wrong. He does wrong unwillingly. According to Plotinus's analysis, the difference between one who acts willingly and one who does not is this:

For this reason, we will not designate the actions of evil persons, who do many things according to [their] imaginings, as 'up to them' or voluntary, whereas we will designate those as self-determining who, owing to the activities of intellect, are free from the affections of the body. Referring 'up to us' to the most noble principle, the activity of intellect, we will designate as really free the premises that come from there and claim that the desires that arise from thinking are not involuntary, and we will say that [self-determination] is found among the gods who live in this manner. (VI 8.3, 17–26)<sup>57</sup>

The 'really free premises' are universal premises in practical syllogisms.<sup>58</sup> The desires that arise from thinking are voluntary, in contrast to those arising from states of the body. The premises are free from impediments thrown up by the latter, involuntary, desires. Self-determination is the coincidence of desire and true identity.<sup>59</sup> Plotinus then proceeds to raise a profound objection to this line of thinking:

Still, one might seek to determine how that which comes about according to desire will be self-determining, since desire is directed to something outside us and indicates a lack; for that to which desire is led, even if it is led to the Good. (III 8.11, 22–24)<sup>60</sup>

The point is that any desire is already determined by its object. In that case, how can anything done according to desire be self-determining? Plotinus's concise answer is this:

<sup>57</sup> Διὸ καὶ τοῖς φαύλοις κατὰ ταύτας πράττουσι τὰ πολλὰ οὔτε τὸ ἐπ' αὐτοῖς οὔτε τὸ ἐκούσιον δώσομεν, τῷ δὲ διὰ νοῦ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν ἐλευθέρῳ τῶν παθημάτων τοῦ σώματος τὸ αὐτεξούσιον δώσομεν—εἰς ἀρχὴν τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν καλλίστην ἀνάγοντες τὴν τοῦ νοῦ ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὰς ἐντεῦθεν προτάσεις ἐλευθέρως ὄντως δώσομεν, καὶ τὰς ὀρέξεις τὰς ἐκ τοῦ νοεῖν ἐγχειρομένας οὐκ ἀκουσίους εἶναι δώσομεν, καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς τοῦτον ζῶσι τὸν τρόπον ὅσοι νῶ καὶ ὀρέξει τῇ κατὰ νοῦν ζῶσι φήσομεν παρῆναι.

<sup>58</sup> Aristotle, *NE* VII 3, 1147a1. See Kenny (1979), 164–5, who shows that for Aristotle the universal premise never fails to be effective; the failure is always with respect to cognition of the minor premise or of the conclusion. Analogously, Stoics equate assent with impulse to act.

<sup>59</sup> At IV 4.44, 5–6, Plotinus contrasts one self-determined by reason with one whose 'premises' for action arise from bodily states. The former identifies himself with the object of his contemplation, whereas in the latter, there is no such identification.

<sup>60</sup> Καίτοι ζητήσκειν ἂν τις, πῶς ποτε τὸ κατ' ὀρεξιν γιγνόμενον αὐτεξούσιον ἔσται τῆς ὀρέξεως ἐπὶ τὸ ἔξω ἀγούσης καὶ τὸ ἐνδεδεῖς ἐχούσης· ἄγεται γὰρ τὸ ὀρεγόμενον, καὶ εἰ πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἄγοιτο.

How could something borne towards the Good be forced, since its desire is voluntary, if knowing that it is good, it goes towards it as good? For that which is involuntary is a diversion from the Good and towards that which is forced, if something is borne towards that which is not good for it. (VI 8.4, 12–17)<sup>61</sup>

The last words of this passage make explicit the crucial qualification. Every person desires his or her own good. He who is borne towards that which is not good for himself acts unwillingly because he does not know that it is not good for himself. He does not know that nothing is good for himself except the Good. Even one who desires that which is in fact good for himself does not do so in the manner of one who identifies his own good with the Good. The only way to do this is to identify oneself exclusively as the subject of the desire for the Good.

Plotinus proceeds to acknowledge that the complete identification with intellect is impossible for the embodied person. Hence, self-determination for one embodied has to be found in virtue, by which Plotinus means ‘moral virtue’. But here yet another problem arises, namely, that virtuous actions are themselves determined by externals, and so not free. As Plotinus puts it, a virtuous person would not choose to have wars, disease, and poverty just in order to be able to practice his virtue.<sup>62</sup> So, the presence of these in a way compels him. How, then, can it be, as Plato says, that ‘virtue has no master’?<sup>63</sup>

Virtue is self-determining since it ‘intellectualizes the soul’.<sup>64</sup> One of the basic principles of Plotinus’s metaphysical system is that Soul is, in general, an expression of Intellect.<sup>65</sup> What does the ‘intellectualization of soul’ that arises from virtue add to this? Recognizing the identity of soul and self, we may interpret this as indicating the self-identification with second-order desire. This desire is the provenance of embodied intellect. Virtue intellectualizes the soul because it disposes one to desire that which intellect determines is good.

<sup>61</sup> Πῶς δὲ πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν τι φερόμενον ἡναγκασμένον ἂν εἴη ἐκουσίῳ τῆς ἐφέσεως οὐσης, εἰ εἰδῶς ὅτι ἀγαθὸν ὡς ἐπ’ ἀγαθὸν ἴοι; Τὸ γὰρ ἀκούσιον ἀπαγωγή ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἡναγκασμένον, εἰ πρὸς τοῦτο φέροιτο, ὃ μὴ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ. Cf. Aristotle, *NE* III 1, 1110a1–b16.

<sup>62</sup> VI 8.5, 13 ff.

<sup>63</sup> *Republic* 617c3.

<sup>64</sup> VI 8.5, 35. Cf. VI 7.35, 4–6.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. I 8.11, 17; III 3.3, 34; III 5, 9, 19–20; V 1.3, 9; V 1.6, 45–56; V 1.7, 44; V 3.8, 36.



Moral virtue is, accordingly, a ‘kind of intellect’ (*nous tis*). When it is present, and only when it is present, one who acts is free, and what he does is ‘up to him’.<sup>66</sup> He acts ‘without impediment’ (*anempodistós*), both externally and internally; the former, because external circumstances did not produce an involuntary desire in him and the latter, because no first-order desire was determinative of his action. In this regard, moral virtue is an image of contemplative virtue, wherein is to be found the perfect coincidence of thinking and desiring, that is, second-order desiring.<sup>67</sup> This type of desiring, *boulêsis*, is an ‘imitation’ (*mimêsis*) of the activity of intellect. For it desires the Good which intellect possesses.

Vice, and its next of kin, incontinence, are thus ignorance of self, as Plotinus puts it in the famous beginning to *Ennead* V 1. Souls or persons, wanting to be ‘by themselves’, end up honoring ‘everything more than themselves’.<sup>68</sup> They end up honoring everything which can be an object of first-order desire, and thus forget their own identities.

Plotinus, like his predecessors whom I have briefly discussed, conflates ‘will’ with one type of ‘desire’ (*orexis*), namely, *boulêsis*, or ‘rational desire’.<sup>69</sup> I have interpreted this as a second-order desire. *Akrasia* is, on this account, owing to a confusion in regard to one’s own good based on a deeper confusion in regard to one’s own identity. Whether the confusion is chronic or sporadic or even remediable is a secondary question.

### Conclusion

What I have tried to show in this paper is that Plotinus appropriates Peripatetic and Stoic insights into his expression of Platonic moral psychology. His use of Stoicism is especially impressive because he was not deterred by what he certainly took to be the inadequacies of Stoic metaphysics. As Aristotle remarked, rational desire is for the unqualified,

<sup>66</sup> VI 8.6, 30–31.

<sup>67</sup> VI 8.6, 32 ff.: Ἡ δὲ βούλησις ἡ νόησις (line 36).

<sup>68</sup> V. 1.1 ff.; cf. IV 4.3, 1–3; IV 8.5, 28; VI 9.8, 31–32.

<sup>69</sup> When *boulêsis* is analyzed into intellect plus will, as it is in the later medieval tradition, intellect becomes the final cause of will and will the efficient cause of intellect. One may usefully compare here Aristotle’s analysis of substantial form as both efficient cause and final cause. What is one in being is two in *logos*.

not the apparent, good. Plotinus wants to insist that the weakness that is a turning away from the real good is based on a failure to separate the real good that one truly desires from the apparent goods proposed to the embodied person. This failure is nothing more nor less than an inability to give the correct answer to the question 'who am I?'

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